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LOVE AND LIFE

AN

Old Story in Eighteenth Century Costume



LOVE AND LIFE

AN

Old Story in Eighteenth Century Costume

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

AUTHOR OF THE "HEIR OF REDCLYFFE," ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME I

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LOVE AND LIFE:

AN

Old Story in Eighteenth Century Costume.

CHAPTER I.

A SYLLABUB PARTY.

Oft have I shadowed such a group
Of beauties that were born
In teacup times of hood and hoop,
And when the patch was worn ;
And legs and arms with love-knots gay.
About me leaped and laughed
The modish Cupid of the day,
And shrilled his tinselled shaft.—TENNYSON.

IF times differ, human nature and national character vary but little ; and thus, in looking back on former times, we are by turns startled by what is curiously like, and curiously unlike, our own sayings and doings.

VOL. I.

B

The feelings of a retired officer of the nineteenth century expecting the return of his daughters from the first gaiety of the youngest darling, are probably not dissimilar to those of Major Delavie, in the earlier half of the seventeen hundreds, as he sat in the deep bay window of his bed-room ; though he wore a green velvet nightcap ; and his whole provision of mental food consisted of half a dozen worn numbers of the *Tatler*, and a *Gazette* a fortnight old. The chair on which he sat was elbowed, and made easy with cushions and pillows, but that on which his lame foot rested was stiff and angular. The cushion was exquisitely worked in chain-stitch, as were the quilt and curtains of the great four-post bed, and the only carpeting consisted of three or four narrow strips of wool-work. The walls were of plain plaster, white-washed, and wholly undecorated, except that the mantelpiece was carved with the hideous caryatides of the early Stewart days, and over it were suspended a long cavalry sabre, and the accompanying spurs and pistols ; above them the miniature of an exquisitely lovely woman, with

a white rose in her hair and a white favour on her breast.

The window was a deep one projecting far into the narrow garden below, for in truth the place was one of those old manor houses which their wealthy owners were fast deserting in favour of new specimens of classical architecture as understood by Louis XIV., and the room in which the Major sat was one of the few kept in habitable repair. The garden was rich with white pinks, peonies, lilies of the valley, and early roses, and there was a flagged path down the centre, between the front door and a wicket-gate into a long lane bordered with hawthorn hedges, the blossoms beginning to blush with the advance of the season. Beyond, rose dimly the spires and towers of a cathedral town, one of those county capitals to which the provincial magnates were wont to resort during the winter, keeping a mansion there for the purpose, and providing entertainment for the gentry of the place and neighbourhood.

Twilight was setting in when the Major began

to catch glimpses of the laced hats of coachman and footmen over the hedges, a lumbering made itself heard, and by and by the vehicle halted at the gate. Such a coach ! It was only the second best, and the glories of its landscape-painted sides were somewhat dimmed, the green and silver of the fittings a little tarnished to a critical eye ; yet it was a splendid article, commodious and capacious, though ill-provided with air and light. However, nobody cared for stuffiness, certainly not the three young ladies, who, fan in hand, came tripping down the steps that were unrolled for them. The eldest paused to administer a fee to their entertainer's servants who had brought them home, and the coach rolled on to dispose of the remainder of the freight.

The father waved greetings from one window, a rosy little audacious figure in a night-dress peeped out furtively from another, and the house door was opened by a tall old soldier-servant, stiff as a ramrod, with hair tightly tied and plastered up into a queue, and a blue and brown livery which sat like a uniform.

“Well, young ladies,” he said, “I hope you enjoyed yourselves.”

“Vastly, thank you, Corporal Palmer. And how has it been with my father in our absence?”

“Purely, Miss Harriet. He relished the Friar’s chicken that Miss Delavie left for him, and he amused himself for an hour with Master Eugene, after which he did me the honour to play two games at backgammon.”

“I hope,” said the eldest sister, coming up, “that the little rogue whom I saw peeping from the window has not been troublesome.”

“He has been as good as gold, madam. He played in master’s room till Nannerl called him to his bed, when he went at once, ‘true to his orders,’ says the master. ‘A fine soldier he will make,’ says I to my master.”

Therewith the sisters mounted the uncarpeted but well-polished oak stair, knocked at their father’s door, and entered one by one, each dropping her curtsey, and, though the eldest was five-and-twenty, neither speaking nor sitting till they were greeted with a hearty, “Come, my

young maids, sit you down and tell your old father your gay doings."

Then the eldest took the only unoccupied chair, while the other two placed themselves on the window-seat, all bolt upright, with both little high heels on the floor, in none of the easy attitudes of damsels of later date, talking over a party. All three were complete gentlewomen in air and manners, though Betty had high cheek-bones, a large nose, rough complexion, and red hair, and her countenance was more loveable and trustworthy than symmetrical. The dainty decorations of youth looked grotesque upon her, and she was so well aware of the fact as to put on no more than was absolutely essential to a lady of birth and breeding. Harriet (pronounced Hawyot), the next in age, had a small well-set head, a pretty neck, and fine dark eyes, but the small-pox had made havoc of her bloom, and left its traces on cheek and brow. The wreck of her beauty had given her a discontented, fretful expression, which rendered her far less pleasing than honest, homely Betty, though she had employed all the devices of the toilette

to conceal the ravages of the malady and enhance her remaining advantages of shape and carriage.

There was an air of vexation about her as her father asked, "Well, how many conquests has my little Aurelia made?" She could not but recollect how triumphantly she had listened to the same inquiry after her own first appearance, scarcely three short years ago. Yet she grudged nothing to Aurelia, her junior by five years, who was for the first time arrayed as a full-grown belle, in a pale blue, tight-sleeved, long-waisted silk, open and looped up over a primrose skirt, embroidered by her own hands with tiny blue butterflies hovering over harebells. There were blue silk shoes, likewise home-made, with silver buckles, and the long mittens and deep lace ruffles were of Betty's fabrication. Even the dress itself had been cut by Harriet from old wedding hoards of their mother's, and made up after the last mode imported by Madam Churchill at the Deanery.

The only part of the equipment not of domestic handiwork was the structure on the head. The Carminster hairdresser had been making his

rounds since daylight, taking his most distinguished customers last; and as the Misses Delavie were not high on the roll, Harriet and Aurelia had been under his hands at nine A.M. From that time till three, when the coach called for them, they had sat captive on low stools under a tent of table-cloth over tall chair-backs to keep the dust out of the frosted edifice constructed out of their rich dark hair, of the peculiar tint then called mouse-colour. Betty had refused to submit to this durance. "What sort of dinner would be on my father's table-cloth if I were to sit under one all day?" said she in answer to Harriet's representation of the fitness of things. "La, my dear, what matters it what an old scarecrow like me puts on?"

Old maidenhood set in much earlier in those days than at present; the sisters acquiesced, and Betty had run about as usual all the morning in her mob-cap, and chintz gown tucked through her pocket-holes, and only at the last submitted her head to the manipulations of Corporal Palmer, who daily powdered his master's wig.

Strange and unnatural as was the whitening of the hair, it was effective in enhancing the beauty of Aurelia's dark arched brows, the soft brilliance of her large velvety brown eyes, and the exquisite carnation and white of her colouring. Her features were delicately chiselled, and her face had that peculiar fresh, innocent, soft, untouched bloom and undisturbed repose which form the special charm and glory of the first dawn of womanhood. Her little head was well poised on a slender neck, just now curving a little to one side with the fatigue of the hours during which it had sustained her headgear. This consisted of a tiny flat hat, about the size of a plate, made of white chip, fastened on by long pins, and adorned by a cluster of campanulas like those on her dress, with a similar blue butterfly quivering on an invisible wire above them, the dainty handiwork of Harriet.

The inquiry about conquests was a matter of course after a young lady's first party, but Aurelia looked too childish for it, and Betty made haste to reply,

"Aurelia was a very good girl. No one could have curtsied or bridled more prettily when we paid our respects to my Lady Herries and Mrs. Churchill, and the Dean highly commended her dancing."

"You danced? Fine doings! I thought you were merely invited to look on at the game at bowls. Who had the best of the match?"

"The first game was won by Canon Boltby, the second by the Dean," said Betty; "but when they would have played the conqueror, Lady Herries interfered and said the gentlemen had kept the field long enough, and now it was our turn. So a cow was driven on the bowling-green, with a bell round her neck and pink ribbons on her horns."

"A cow! What will they have next?"

"They say 'tis all the mode in London," interposed Harriet.

"Pray was the cow to instruct you in dancing?" continued the Major.

"No, sir" said Aurelia, whom he had addressed; "she was to be milked into the bowl of syllabub."

This was received with a great "Ho! ho!" and a demand who was to act milker.

"That was the best of it," said Aurelia. "Soon came Miss Herries in a straw hat, and the prettiest green petticoat under a white gown and apron, as dairy-maid, but the cow would not stand still, for all the man who led her kept on scolding her and saying 'Coop! coop!' No sooner had Miss Herries seated herself on the stool than Moolly swerved away, and it was a mercy that the fine china bowl escaped. Every one was laughing, and poor Miss Herries was ready to cry, when forth steps my sister, coaxes the cow, bids the man lend his apron, sits down on the stool, and has the bowl frothing in a moment."

"I would not have done so for worlds," said Harriet; "I dreaded every moment to be asked where Miss Delavie learnt to be a milk-maid."

"You were welcome to reply, In her own yard," said Betty. "You may thank me for your syllabub."

"Which, after all, you forbade poor Aura to taste!"

"Assuredly. I was not going to have her turn sick on my hands. She may think herself beholden to me for her dance with that fine young beau. Who was he, Aura?"

"How now!" said the Major, in a tone of banter, while Harriet indulged in a suppressed giggle. "You let Aura dance with a stranger! Where was your circumspection, Mrs. Betty?" Aurelia coloured to the roots of her hair and faltered, "It was Lady Herries who presented him."

"Yes, the child is not to blame," said Betty; "I left her in the charge of Mrs. Churchill while I went to wash my hands after milking the cow, which these fine folk seemed to suppose could be done without soiling a finger."

"That's the way with Chloe and Phyllida in Arcadia," said her father.

"But not here," said Betty. "In the house, I was detained a little while, for the housekeeper wanted me to explain my recipe for taking out grease spots."

"A little while, sister?" said Harriet. "It

was through the dancing of three minuets, and the country dance had long been begun."

"I was too busy to heed the time," said Betty, "for I obtained the recipe for those delicious almond-cakes, and showed Mrs. Waldron the Vienna mode of clearing coffee. When I came back the fiddles were playing, and Aurelia going down the middle with a young gentleman in a scarlet coat. Poor little Robert Rowe was too bashful to find a partner, though he longed to dance; so I made another couple with him, and thus missed further speech, save that as we took our leave, both Sir George and the Dean complimented me, and said what there is no occasion to repeat just now, sir, when I ought to be fetching your supper."

"Ha! Is it too flattering for little Aura?" asked her father. "Come, never spare. She will hear worse than that in her day, I'll warrant."

"It was merely," said Betty, reluctantly, "that the Dean called her the star of the evening, and declared that her dancing equalled her face."

"Well said of his reverence! And his honour the baronet, what said he?"

"He said, sir, that so comely and debonnaire a couple had not been seen in these parts since you came home from Flanders and led off the assize ball with Mistress Urania Delavie."

"There, Aura, 'tis my turn to blush!" cried the Major, comically hiding his face behind Betty's fan. "But all this time you have never told me who was this young spark."

"That I cannot tell, sir," returned Betty. "We were sent home in the coach with Mistress Duckworth and her daughters, who talked so incessantly that we could not open our lips. Who was he, Aura?"

"My Lady Herries only presented him as Sir Amyas, sister," replied Aurelia.

"Sir Amyas!" cried her auditors, all together.

"Nothing more," said Aurelia. "Indeed she made as though he and I must be acquainted, and I suppose that she took me for Harriet, but I knew not how to explain."

"No doubt," said Harriet. "I was sick of the

music and folly, and had retired to the summer-house with Peggy Duckworth, who had brought a sweet sonnet of Mr. Ambrose Phillips, 'Defying Cupid.'"

Her father burst into a chuckling laugh, much to her mortification, though she would not seem to understand it, and Betty took up the moral.

"Sir Amyas! Are you positive that you caught the name, child?"

"I thought so, sister," said Aurelia, with the insecurity produced by such cross-questioning; "but I may have been mistaken, since, of course, the true Sir Amyas Belamour would never be here without my father's knowledge."

"Nor is there any other of the name," said her father, "except that melancholic uncle of his who never leaves his dark chamber."

"Depend upon it," said Harriet, "Lady Herries said Sir Ambrose. No doubt it was Sir Ambrose Watford."

"Nay, Harriet, I demur to that," said her father drolly. "I flatter myself I was a more personable youth than to be likened to Watford with his

swollen nose. What like was your cavalier, Aura?"

"Indeed, sir, I cannot describe him. I was so much terrified lest he should speak to me that I had much ado to mind my steps. I know he had white gloves and diamond shoe-buckles, and that his feet moved by no means like those of Sir Ambrose."

"Aura is a modest child, and does credit to her breeding," said Betty. "Thus much I saw, that the young gentleman was tall and personable enough to bear comparison even to you, sir, not more than nineteen or twenty years of age, in a laced scarlet uniform, as I think, of the Dragoon Guards, and with a little powder, but not enough to disguise that his hair was entire gold."

"That all points to his being indeed young Belamour," said her father; "age, military appearance, and all—I wonder what this portends!"

"What a disaster!" exclaimed Harriet, "that my sister and I should have been out of the way, and only a chit like Aura be there to be presented to him."

"If young ladies *will* defy Cupid," began her father ;—but at that moment Corporal Palmer knocked at the door, bringing a basin of soup for his master, and announcing "Supper is served, young ladies."

Each of the three bent her knee to receive her father's blessing and kiss, then curtsying at the door, departed, Betty lingering behind her two juniors to see her father taste his soup and to make sure that he relished it.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOUSE OF DELAVIE.

All his Paphian mother fear ;
Empress ! all thy sway revere !

EURIPIDES (Anstice).

THE parlour where the supper was laid was oak panelled, but painted white. Like a little island in the vast polished slippery floor lay a square much-worn carpet, just big enough to accommodate a moderate-sized table and the surrounding high-backed chairs. There was a tent-stitch rug before the Dutch-tiled fireplace, and on the walls hung two framed prints,—one representing the stately and graceful Duke of Marlborough ; the other, the small, dark, pinched, but fiery Prince Eugene. On the spotless white cloth was spread a frugal meal of bread, butter, cheese, and lettuce ; a jug of milk, another of water, and

a bottle of cowslip wine ; for the habits of the family were more than usually frugal and abstemious.

Frugality and health alike obliged Major Delavie to observe a careful regimen. He had served in all Marlborough's campaigns, and had afterwards entered the Austrian army, and fought in the Turkish war, until he had been disabled before Belgrade by a terrible wound, of which he still felt the effects. Returning home with his wife, the daughter of a Jacobite exile, he had become a kind of agent in managing the family estate for his cousin the heiress, Lady Belamour, who allowed him to live rent-free in this almost ruinous old Manor-house, the cradle of the family.

This was all that Harriet and Aurelia knew. The latter had been born at the Manor, and young girls, if not brought extremely forward, were treated like children ; but Elizabeth, the eldest of the family, who could remember Vienna, was so much the companion and confidante of her father, that she was more on the level of a mother than a sister to her juniors.

"Then you think Aurelia's beau was really Sir Amyas Belamour," said Harriet, as they sat down to supper.

"So it appears," said Betty, gravely.

"Do you think he will come hither, sister? I would give the world to see him," continued Harriet.

"He said something of hoping for better acquaintance," softly put in Aurelia.

"Oh, did he so?" cried Harriet. "For demure as you are, Miss Aura, I fancy you looked a little above the diamond shoe-buckles!"

"Fie, Harriet!" exclaimed Betty; "I will not have the child tormented. He ought to come and pay his respects to my father."

"Have you ever seen my Lady?" asked Aurelia.

"That have I, Miss Aurelia," interposed Corporal Palmer, "and a rare piece of beauty she would be, if one could forget the saying 'handsome is as handsome does.'"

"I never knew what she has done," said Aurelia.

"'Tis a long story," hastily said Betty, "too

long to tell at table. I must make haste to prepare the poultice for my father."

She quickly broke up the supper party, and the two younger sisters repaired to their chamber, both conscious of having been repressed; the one feeling injured, the other rebuked for forwardness and curiosity. The three sisters shared one long low room with a large light closet at each end. One of these was sacred to powder, the other was Betty's private property. Harriet had a little white bed to herself, Betty and Aurelia nightly climbed into a lofty and solemn structure curtained with ancient figured damask. Each had her own toilette-table and a press for her clothes, where she contrived to stow them in a wonderfully small space.

Harriet and Aurelia had divested themselves of their finery before Betty came in, and they assisted her operations, Harriet preferring a complaint that she never would tell them anything.

"I have no objection to tell you at fitting times," said Betty, "but not with Palmer putting in his word. You should have discretion, Harriet."

“The Dean’s servants never speak when they are waiting at table,” said Harriet with a pout.

“But I’ll warrant them to hear!” retorted Betty.

“And I had rather have our dear old honest corporal than a dozen of those fine lackeys,” said Aurelia. “But you will tell us the story like a dear good sister, while we brush the powder out of our hair.”

They put on powdering gowns, after releasing themselves from the armour of their stays, and were at last at ease, each seated on a wooden chair in the powdering closet, brush in hand, with a cloud of white dust flying round, and the true colour of the hair beginning to appear.

“Then it is indeed true that my Lady is one of the greatest beauties of Queen Caroline’s Court, if not the greatest?” said Harriet.

“Truly she is,” said Betty, “and though in full maturity, she preserves the splendour of her prime.”

“Tell us more particularly,” said Aurelia; “can she be more lovely than was our dear mamma?”

“No, indeed! lovely was never the word for her, to my mind,” said Betty; “her face always seemed to me like that of one of the marble statues I remember at Vienna; perfect, but clear, cold, and hard. But I am no judge, for I did not love her, and in a child, admiration accompanies affection.”

“What did Palmer mean by ‘handsome is that handsome does’? Surely my father never was ill-treated by Lady Belamour?”

“Let me explain,” said the elder sister. “The ancient custom and precedent of our family have always transmitted the estates to the male heir. But when Charles II. granted the patent of nobility to the first Baron Delavie, the barony was limited to the heirs male of his body, and our grandfather was only his brother. The last Lord had three sons, and one daughter, Urania, who alone survived him.”

“I know all that from the monument,” said Aurelia; “one was drowned while bathing, one died of spotted fever, and one was killed at the battle of Ramillies. How dreadful for the poor old father!”

“And there is no Lord Delavie now,” said Harriet. “Why, since my Lady could not have the title, did it not come to our papa?”

“Because his father was not in the patent,” said Betty. “However, it was thought that if he were married to Mistress Urania, there would be a fresh creation in their favour. So as soon as the last campaign was over, our father, who had always been a favourite at the great house, was sent for from the army, and given to understand that he was to conduct his courtship, with the cousin he had petted as a little child, as speedily as was decorous. However, in winter quarters at Tournai he had already pledged his faith to the daughter of a Scottish gentleman in the Austrian service. This engagement was viewed by the old Lord as a trifling folly, which might be set aside by the head of the family. He hinted that the proposed match was by no means disagreeable to his daughter, and scarcely credited his ears when his young kinsman declared his honour forbade him to break with Miss Murray.”

“Dear father,” ejaculated Aurelia, “so he gave up everything for her sake?”

“And never repented it!” said Betty.

“Now,” said Harriet, “I understand why he entered the imperial army.”

“It was all he had to depend on,” said Betty, “and he had been favourably noticed by Prince Eugene at the siege of Lisle, so that he easily obtained a commission. He believed that though it was in the power of the old Lord to dispose of part of his estates by will, yet that some of the land was entailed in the male line, so that there need not be many years of campaigning or poverty for his bride, even if her father never were restored to his Scottish property. As you know, our grandfather, Sir Archibald Murray, died for his loyalty in the rising of ’15, and two years later our father received at Belgrade that terrible wound which closed his military career. Meantime, Urania had married Sir Jovian Belamour, and Lord Delavie seemed to have forgotten my father’s offence, and gave him the management of the estate, with this old house to live in, showing him-

self glad of the neighbourhood of a kinsman whom he could thoroughly trust. All went well till my Lady came to visit her father. Then all old offences were renewed. Lady Belamour treated my mother as a poor dependant. She, daughter to a noble line of pedigree far higher than that of the Delavies, might well return her haughty looks, and would not yield an inch, nor join in the general adulation. There were disputes about us children. Poor Archie was a most beautiful boy, and though you might not suppose it, I was a very pretty little girl, this nose of mine being then much more shapely than the little buttons which grow to fair proportions. On the other hand, the little Belamours were puny and sickly; indeed, as you know, this young Sir Amyas, who was not then born, is the only one of the whole family who has been reared. Then we had been carefully bred, could chatter French, recite poetry, make our bow and curtsy, bridle, and said Sir and Madam, while the poor little cousins who had been put out to nurse had no more manners than

the calves and pigs. People were the more flattering to us because they expected soon to see my father in his Lordship's place; and on the other hand, officious tongues were not wanting to tell my Lady how Mrs. Delavie contrasted the two sets of children. Very bitter offence was taken; nor has my Lady ever truly forgiven, whatever our dear good father may believe. When the old Lord died, a will was found, bequeathing all his unentailed estates to his daughter, and this was of course strong presumption that he believed in the existence of a deed of entail; but none could ever be found, and the precedents were not held to establish the right."

"Did he leave my father nothing?" asked Harriet.

"He left him three hundred pounds and made him joint executor with Sir Jovian. There was no mention of this house, which was the original house of the family, the first Lord having built the Great House; and both my father and Sir Jovian were sure that Lord Delavie believed it would come to him; but no proofs were extant,

and my Lady would only consent to his occupying it, as before, as her agent."

"I always knew we were victims to an injustice," said Harriet, "though I never understood the matter exactly."

"You were a mere child, and my father does not love to talk of it. He ceased to care much about the loss after our dear Archie died."

"Not for Eugene's sake?"

"Eugene was not born for two years after Archie's death. My dear mother had drooped from the time of the disappointment, blaming herself for having ruined my father, and scarce accepting comfort when he vowed that all was well lost for her sake. She reproached herself with having been proud and unconciliatory, though I doubt whether it made much difference. Then her spirit was altogether crushed by the loss of Archie, she never had another day's health. Eugene came to her like Ichabod to Phinehas' wife, and she was soon gone from us," said Betty, wiping away a tear.

"Leaving us a dear sister to be a mother to us," said Aurelia, raising her sweet face for a kiss.

Harriet pondered a little, and said, "My Lady is not at enmity with us, since my father keeps the house and agency."

"We should be reduced to poverty indeed without them," said Betty; "and Sir Jovian, an upright honourable man, the only person whom my Lady truly respected, insisted on his continuance. As long as my Lady regards his memory we are safe, but no one can trust to her caprice."

"She never comes here, nor disturbs my father."

"No, but she makes heavy calls on the estate, and is displeased if he refuses to overpress the tenants or hesitates to cut the timber."

"I have heard say," added Harriet, "that her debts in town and her losses at play drove her to accept her present husband, Mr. Wayland, a hideous old fellow, who had become vastly rich through some discovery about cannon."

"He is an honourable and upright man," said Betty. "I should have fewer anxieties if he had not been sent out to Gibraltar and Minorca to superintend the fortifications."

"Meantime my Lady makes the money fly, by

the help of the gallant Colonel Mar," said Harriet lightly.

"Fie! Harriet!" returned the elder sister; "I have allowed you too far. My father calls Lady Belamour his commanding officer, and permits no scandal to be spoken of her."

"Any more than of Prince Eugene?" said Harriet, laughing.

"But oh! sister!" cried Aurelia, "let us stay a little longer. I have not half braided my hair, and I long to hear who is the gentleman of whom my father spoke as living in the dark."

"Mr. Amyas Belamour! Sir Jovan's brother! Ah! that is a sad story," replied Betty, "though I am not certain that I have it correctly, having only heard it discussed between my father and mother when I was a growing girl, sitting at my sampler. I think he was a barrister; I know he was a very fine gentleman and a man of parts, who had made the Grand Tour; for when he was staying at the Great House, he said my mother was the only person he met who could converse with him on the Old Masters, or any other subject of *virtù*, and that,

being reported to my Lady, increased her bitterness, all the more because Mr. Belamour was a friend of Mr. Addison and Sir Richard Steele, and had contributed some papers to the *Spectator*. He was making a good fortune in his profession, and had formed an engagement with a young lady in Hertfordshire, of a good old family, but one which had always been disliked by Lady Belamour. It is said, too, that Miss Sedhurst had been thought to have attracted one of my Lady's many admirers, and that the latter was determined not to see her rival become her sister-in-law, and probably with the same title, since Mr. Belamour was on the verge of obtaining knighthood. So, if she be not greatly belied, Lady Belamour plied all parties with her confidences, till she contrived to breed suspicion and jealousy on all sides, until finally Miss Sedhurst's brother, a crack-brained youth, offered such an insult to Mr. Belamour, that honour required a challenge. It was thought that as Mr. Belamour was the superior in age and position, the matter might have been composed, but the young man was fiery and hot tempered, and would neither

retract nor apologise ; and Mr. Belamour had been stung in his tenderest feelings. They fought with pistols, an innovation that, as you know, my father hates, as far more deadly and unskilful than the noble practice of fencing ; and the result was that Mr. Sedhurst was shot dead, and Mr. Belamour received a severe wound in the head. The poor young lady, being always of a delicate constitution, fell into fits on hearing of the news, and died in a few weeks. The unfortunate Mr. Belamour survives, but whether from injury to the brain, or from grief and remorse, he has never been able to endure either light or company, but has remained ever since in utter darkness and seclusion."

"Utter darkness ! How dreadful !" cried Aurelia, shuddering.

"How long has this been, sister ?" inquired Harriet.

"About nine years," said Betty. "The lamentable affair took place just before Sir Jovian's death, and the shock may have hastened it, for he had long been in a languishing state. It was

the more unfortunate, since he had made Mr. Belamour sole personal guardian to his only surviving son, and appointed him, together with my father and another gentleman, trustee for the Belamour property; and there has been much difficulty in consequence of his being unable to act, or to do more than give his signature."

"Ah! sister, I wish you had not told me," said Aurelia. "I shall dream of the unfortunate gentleman all night. Nine years of utter darkness!"

"We know who is still child enough to hate darkness," said Harriet.

"Take care," said Betty. "You must make haste, or I shall leave you to it."

CHAPTER III.

AMONG THE COWSLIPS.

The insect youth are on the wing,
Eager to taste the honeyed spring,
And float amid the liquid noon.
Some lightly on the torrent skim,
Some show their gaily gilded trim,
Quick glancing to the sun.—GRAY.

THOUGH hours were early, the morning meal was not served till so late as really to deserve the title of breakfast.

When the three sisters sat down at nine o'clock, in mob caps, and the two younger in white dresses, all had been up at least two hours. Aurelia led forward little Eugene in a tailed red coat, long-breasted buff waistcoat, buff tights and knitted stockings, with a deep frilled collar under the flowing locks on his shoulders, in curls which emulated a wig. She had been

helping him to prepare "his tasks" from the well-thumbed but strongly-bound books which had served poor Archie before him. They were deposited on the window-seat to wait till the bowls of bread and milk were discussed, since tea and coffee were only a special afternoon treat not considered as wholesome for children; so that Aurelia had only just been promoted to them, along with powder and a fan.

Harriet wore her favourite pistachio ribbon round her cap and as a breast-knot, and her cheeks bore token of one of the various washes with which she was always striving to regain the smoothness of her complexion. Knowing what this betokened, an elder-sisterly instinct of caution actuated Betty to remind her juniors of an engagement made with Dame Jewel of the upland farm for the exchange of a setting of white ducks' eggs for one of five-toed fowls, and to request them to carry the basket.

Eugene danced on his chair and begged to be of the party; but Harriet pouted, and asked why the "odd boy" could not be sent.

"Because, as you very well know, if he did not break, he would addle, every egg in the basket."

"There can be no need to go to-day."

"The speckled hen is clocking to brood, and she is the best mother in the yard. Besides, it is time that the cowslip wine were made, and I will give you some bread and cheese and gingerbread for noonchin, so that you may fill your baskets in the meadows before they are laid up for grass. Mrs. Jewel will give you a drink of milk."

"O let me go, sister!" pleaded Eugene. "She gives us bread and honey! And I want to hear the lapwings in the meadows cry pee-wit."

"We shall have you falling into the river," said Harriet, rather fretfully.

"No, indeed! If you fall in, I will pull you out. Young maids should not run about the country without a gentleman to take care of them. Should they, sister?" cried the doughty seven years' old champion.

"Who taught you that, sir?" asked Betty, trying to keep her countenance.

"I heard Mrs. Churchill say so to my papa," returned the boy. "So now, there's a good sister. Do pray let me go!"

"If you say your tasks well, and will promise to be obedient to Harriet and to keep away from the river, and not touch the basket of eggs."

Eugene was ready for any number of promises; and Harriet, seeing there was no escape for her, went off with Aurelia to put on their little three-cornered muslin handkerchiefs and broad-brimmed straw hats, while Eugene repeated his tasks, namely, a fragment of the catechism, half a column of spelling from the *Universal Spelling-Book*, and (Betty's special pride) his portion of the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* of Johannes Amos Comenius, the wonderful vocabulary, with still more wonderful "cuts," that was then the small boy's path to Latinity.

The Eagle, *Aquila*, the King of Birds, *Rex Avium*, looketh at the Sun, *intuetur Solem*, as indeed he could hardly avoid doing, since in the "cut" the sun was within a hairsbreadth of his beak, while his claws were almost touching

a crow (*Corvus*) perched on a dead horse, to exemplify how *Aves Raptores* fed on carrion.

Thanks to Aurelia's private assistance, Eugene knew his lessons well enough for his excitement not to make him stumble so often as to prevent Betty's pronouncing him a good boy, and dispensing with his copy, sum, piece, and reading, until the evening. These last were very tough affairs, the recitation being from Shakespeare, and the reading from the *Spectator*. There were no children's books, properly so called, except the ballads, chap-books brought round by pedlers, often far from edifying, and the plunge from the horn-book into general literature was, to say the least of it, bracing.

The Delavie family was cultivated for the time. French had been brought home as a familiar tongue, though *Télémaque*, Racine, and *Le Grand Cyrus* were the whole library in that language; and there was not another within thirty miles. On two days in the week the sisters became Mesdemoiselles Elisabeth, Henriette, and Aurélie, and conversed in French over their spinning,

seams, lace, or embroidery ; nor was Aurelia yet emancipated from reciting Racine on alternate days with Milton and Shakespeare.

Betty could likewise talk German with the old Austrian maid, Nannerl, who had followed the family from Vienna ; but the accomplishment was not esteemed, and the dialect was barbarous. From the time of her mother's death, Betty had been a strict and careful, though kind, ruler to her sisters ; and the long walk was a greater holiday to Aurelia than to Eugene, releasing her from her book and work, whereas he would soon have been trundling his hoop, and haunting the steps of Palmer, who was gardener as well as valet, butler, and a good deal besides, and moreover drilled his young master. Thus Eugene carried his head as erect as any Grenadier in the service, and was a thorough little gentleman in miniature ; a perfect little beau, as his sisters loved to call the darling of their hearts and hopes.

Even Harriet could not be cross to him, though she made Aurelia carry the eggs, and indulged in

sundry petulant whisks of the fan which she carried by way of parasol. "Now, why does Betty do this?" she exclaimed, as soon as they were out of hearing. "Is it to secure to herself the whole enjoyment of your beau?"

"You forget," said Aurelia. "You promised to fetch the eggs, when we met Mrs. Jewel jogging home from market on her old blind white horse last Saturday, because you said no eggs so shaken could ever be hatched."

"You demure chit!" exclaimed Harriet; "would you make me believe that you have no regrets for so charming a young gentleman, my Lady's son and our kinsman."

"If he spoke to me I should not know how to answer, and then you would blame my rudeness. Besides," she added, with childish sagacity, "he can be nothing but a fine London macaroni. Only think of the cowslips! A whole morning to make cowslip balls," she added, with a little frisk. "I would not give one for all the macaronies in England, with their powder and their snuff-boxes. Faugh!"

“Ah, child, you will sing another note perhaps when it is too late,” said her sister, with a sigh between envy and compassion.

It floated past Aurelia unheeded, as she danced up one side of a stile, and sprang clear down into a green park, jumped Eugene down after her by both hands, and exclaimed, “Harriet is in her vapours ; come, let us have a race !”

She was instantly careering along like a white butterfly in the sunshine, flitting on as the child tried to catch her, among the snowy hawthorn bushes, or sinking down for very joy and delight among the bank of wild hyacinths. Life and free motion were joy enough for that happy being with her childish heart, and the serious business of the day was all delight. There lay the rich meadows basking in the sun, and covered with short grass just beginning its summer growth, but with the cowslips standing high above it ; hanging down their rich clusters of soft, pure, delicately-scented bells, from their pinky stems over their pale crinkled leaves, interspersed here and there with the deep purple of the fool’s orchis, and the

pale brown quiver-grass shaking out its trembling awns on their invisible stems. No flower is more delightful to gather than the cowslip, fragrant as the breath of a cow. And Aurelia darted about, piling the golden heap in her basket with untiring enjoyment; then, producing a tape, called on Harriet, who had been working in a more leisurely fashion, to join her in making a cowslip ball, and charged Eugene not to nip off the heads too short.

The sweet, soft, golden globe was made, and even Harriet felt the delicious intoxication. The young things tossed it aloft, flung it from one to the other, caught it, caressed it, buried their faces in it, and threw it back with shrieks of glee.

Suddenly Harriet checked her sister with a peremptory sign. She heard horse-hoofs in the lane, divided from the field by a hedge of pollard willows, so high that she had never thought of being overlooked, till the cessation of the trotting sound struck her; and looking round she saw that a horseman had halted at the gate, and was gazing at their sports. It was from the distance of half

a field, but this was enough to fill Harriet with dismay. She drew herself up in a moment, signing peremptorily to Aurelia, who was flying about, her hat off, her one long curl streaming behind as she darted hither and thither, evading Eugene, who was pursuing her.

As she paused, and Eugene clutched her dress with a shout of ecstasy, Harriet came up, glancing severely towards the gate, and saying, as she handed her sister the hat, "This comes of childishness! That we should be seen thus! What a hoyden he will think you!" as the hoofs went on and the red coat vanished.

"He! Who? Not the farmer?" said Aurelia. "This is not laid up for hay."

"No indeed. I believe it is he," said Harriet, mysteriously.

"He?" repeated Aurelia. "Not Mr. Arden, for he would be in black;" and at Harriet's disgusted gesture, "I beg your pardon, but I did not know you had a new *he*. Oh! surely you are not thinking of the young baronet?"

"I am sure it was his figure."

"You did not see him yesterday?"

"No, but his air had too much distinction for any one from these parts."

"Could you see what his air was from this distance? I should never have guessed it, but you have more experience, being older. Come, Eugene, another race!"

"No, I will have no more folly. I was too good-natured to allow it. I am vexed beyond measure that he should have seen such rusticity."

"Never mind, dear Harriet. Most likely it was no such person, for it was not well-bred to sit staring at us; and if it were he, you were not known to him."

"You were."

"Then he must have eyes as sharp as yours are for an air of distinction. Having only seen me in my blue and primrose suit, how should he know me in my present trim? Besides, I believe it was only young Dick Jewel in a cast coat of Squire Humphrey's."

The charm of the cowslip gathering was broken. Eugene found himself very hungry, and the

noonchin was produced, after which the walk was continued to the farm-house, where the young people were made very welcome.

Farmers were, as a rule, more rustic than the present labourer, but they lived a life of far less care, if of more toil, than their successors, having ample means for their simple needs, and enjoying jocund plenty. The clean kitchen, with the stone floor, the beaupot of maythorn on the empty hearth, the shining walnut-wood table, the spinning-wheel, wooden chairs, and forms, all looked cool and inviting, and the visitors were regaled with home-made brown bread, delicious butter and honey, and a choice of new milk, mead, and currant wine.

Dame Jewel, in a white frill under a black silken hood, a buff turnover kerchief, stout stuff gown and white apron, was delighted to wait on them ; and Eugene's bliss was complete among the young kittens and puppies in baskets on opposite sides of the window, the chickens before their coops, the ducklings like yellow balls on the grass, and the huge family of little spotted piglings which,

to the scandal of his sisters, he declared the most delightful of all.

Their hostess knew nothing of the young baronet being in the neighbourhood, and was by no means gratified by the intelligence.

"Lack-a-day! Miss Harriet, you don't mean that the family is coming down here! I don't want none of them. 'Tis bad times for the farmer when any of that sort is nigh. They make nothing of galloping their horses a hunting right through the crops, ay, and horsewhipping the farmer if he do but say a word for the sweat of his brow."

"O Mrs. Jewel!" cried Aurelia, in whose ear lingered the courteous accents of her partner, "they would never behave themselves so."

"Bless you, Miss Orreely, I'll tell you what I've seen with my own eyes. My own good man, the master here, with the horsewhip laid about his shoulders at that very thornbush, by one of them fine gentlefolks, just because he had mended the gap in the hedge they was used to ride through,

and my Lady sitting by in her laced scarlet habit on her fine horse, smiling like a painted picture, and saying, 'Thank you, sir, the rascals need to learn not to interfere with our sport,' all in that gentle sounding low voice of hers, enough to drive one mad."

"I thought Sir Jovian had been a kind master," said Harriet.

"This was not Sir Jovian. Poor gentleman, he was not often out a-hunting. This was one of the fine young rakish fellows from Lunnun as were always swarming about my Lady, like bees over that maybush. Sir Thomas Donne, I think they called him. They said he got killed by a wild boar, hunting in foreign parts, afterwards, and serve him right! But there! They would all do her bidding, whether for bad or good, so maybe it was less his fault than hers. She is a bitter one, is my Lady, for all she looks so sweet. And this here young barrowknight will be his own mother's son, and I don't want none of 'em down here. 'Tis a good job we have your good papa, the Major, to stand between her and

us; I only wish he had his own, for a rare good landlord he would be."

The Dame's vain wishes were cut short by shrieks from the poultry-yard, where Eugene was discovered up to the ankles in the black ooze of the horse-pond, waving a little stick in defiance of an angry gander, who with white outspread wings, snake-like neck, bent and protruded, and frightful screams and hisses, was no bad representation of his namesake the dragon, especially to a child not much exceeding him in height.

The monster was put to the rout, the champion dragged out of the pond, breathlessly explaining that he only wanted to look at the goslings when the stupid geese cackled and the gander wanted to fly at his eyes. "And I didn't see where I was going, for I had to keep him off, so I got into the mud. Will sister be angry?" he concluded, ruefully surveying the dainty little stockings and shoes coated with black mud.

But before the buckled shoon had been scraped, or the hosen washed and dried, the cheerful memory of boyhood had convinced itself that

the enemy had been put to flight by his manful resistance ; and he turned a deaf ear to Aurelia's suggestion that the affair had been retribution for his constant oblivion of Comenius' assertion that *ausser gingrit*, "the goose gagleth."

They went home more soberly, having been directed by Mrs. Jewel to a field bordered by a copse, where grew the most magnificent of Titania's pensioners tall, wearing splendid rubies in their gold coats ; and in due time the trio presented themselves at home, weary, but glowing with the innocent excitement of their adventures. Harriet was the first to proclaim that they had seen a horseman who must be Sir Amyas. "Had sister seen him?"

"Only through the window of the kitchen where I was making puff paste."

"He called then ! Did my papa see him?"

"My father was in no condition to see any one, being under the hands and razor of Palmer."

"La ! what a sad pity. Did he leave no message?"

“He left his compliments, and hoped his late partner was not fatigued.”

“Is he at the Great House? Will he call again?”

“He is on his way to make a visit in Monmouthshire, together with a brother officer, who is related to my Lady Herries, and finding that their road led them within twenty miles of our town, they decided on making a diversion to see her. It was only from her that Sir Amyas understood how close he was to his mother’s property, for my Lady is extremely jealous of her prerogative.”

“How did you hear all this, sister?”

“Sir George Herries rode over this afternoon and sat an hour with my father, delighting him by averring that the young gentleman has his mother’s charms of person, together with his father’s solidity of principle and character, and that he will do honour to his name.”

“O, I hope he will come back by this route!” cried Harriet.

“Of that there is small likelihood,” said Betty.
“His mother is nearly certain to prevent it, since she is sure to take umbrage at his having visited the Great House without her permission.”

CHAPTER IV.

MY LADY'S MISSIVE.

To the next coffee-house he speeds,
Takes up the news, some scraps he reads.—GAY.

THOUGH Carminster was a cathedral city, the Special General Post only came in once a week, and was liable to delay through storms, snows, mire and highwaymen, so that its arrival was as great an event as is now the coming in of a mail steamer to a colonial harbour. The "post" was a stout countryman, with a red coat, tall jack-boots, and a huge hat. He rode a strong horse, which carried, *en croupe*, an immense pack, covered with oiled canvas, rising high enough to support his back, while he blew a long horn to announce his arrival.

Letters were rare and very expensive articles

unless franked by a Member of Parliament, but gazettes and newsletters formed a large portion of his freight. No private gentleman except the Dean and Sir George Herries went to the extravagance of taking in a newspaper on his own account, but there was a club who subscribed for the *Daily Gazetteer*, the *Tatler*, and one or two other infant forms of periodical literature. These were hastily skimmed on their first arrival at the club-room at the White Dragon, lay on the table to be more deliberately conned for a week, and finally were divided among the members to be handed about among the families and dependants as long as they would hold together.

Major Delavie never willingly missed the coming in of the mail, for his foreign experiences gave him keen interest in the war between France and Austria, and he watched the campaigns of his beloved Prince Eugene with untiring enthusiasm, being, moreover, in the flattering position of general interpreter and guide to his neighbours through the scanty articles on foreign intelligence.

It was about ten days after the syllabub party,

when he had quite recovered his ordinary health, that he mounted his stout pony in his military undress, his cocked hat perched on his well-powdered bob-wig, with a queue half-way down his dark green gold-laced coat, and with his long jack-boots carefully settled by Palmer over the knee that would never cease to give him trouble.

Thus he slowly ambled into the town, catching on his way distant toots of the postman's horn. In due time he made his way into the High Street, broad and unpaved, with rows of lime or poplar trees before the principal houses, the most modern of which were of red brick, with heavy sash-windows, large stone quoins, and steps up to the doors.

The White Dragon, dating from the times of the Mortimer badge, was built of creamy stone, and had an archway conducting the traveller into a courtyard worthy of Chaucer, with ranges of galleries running round it, the balustrades of dark carved oak suiting with the timbers of the latticed windows and gables, and with the noble outside stair at one angle, by which they

communicated with one another. To these beauties the good Major was entirely insensible. He only sighed at the trouble it gave his lame knee to mount the stair to the first storey, and desired the execution of the landlord's barbarous design of knocking down the street front to replace it with a plain, oblong assembly room, red brick outside, and within, blue plaster, adorned with wreaths and bullocks' faces in stucco.

Such were the sentiments of most of the burly squires who had ridden in on the same errand, and throwing the reins to their grooms, likewise climbed the stair to the club-room with its oriel looking over the street. There too were several of the cathedral clergy, the rubicund double-chinned face of the Canon in residence set off by a white, cauliflower wig under a shovel hat, while the humbler minor canons (who served likewise as curates to all the country round) only powdered their own hair, and wore gowns and cassocks of quality very inferior to that which adorned the portly person of their superior. His white bands were of fine cambric, theirs of coarser linen; his stockings

were of ribbed silk, theirs of black worsted ; his buckles of silver, theirs of steel ; and the line of demarcation was as strongly marked as that between the neat, deferential tradesman, and the lawyer in his spruce snuff-coloured coat, or the doctor, as black in hue as the clergy, though with a secular cut, a smaller wig, and a gold-headed cane. Each had, as in duty bound, ordered his pint of port or claret for the good of the house, and it was well if these were not in the end greatly exceeded ; and some had lighted long clay pipes ; but these were mostly of the secondary rank, who sat at the table farthest from the window, and whose drink was a measure of ale.

The letters had not yet been sorted, but the newspaper had been brought in, and Canon Boltby had possessed himself of it, and was proclaiming scraps of intelligence about the King, Queen, and Sir Robert Walpole, the character of Marshal Berwick, recently slain at Philipsburg, an account of Spanish outrages at sea, or mayhap the story of a marvellous beast, half-tiger, half-wolf, reported to be

running wild in France. The other gentlemen, waiting till the mail-bags were opened, listened and commented ; while one or two of the squires, and a shabby, disreputable-looking minor canon made each notable name the occasion of a toast, whether of health to his majesty's friends or confusion to his foes. A squabble, as to whether the gallant Berwick should be reckoned as an honest Frenchman or as a traitor Englishman, was interrupted by the Major's entrance, and the congratulations on his recovery.

One of the squires inquired after his daughters, and pronounced that the little one with the outlandish name was becoming a belle, and would be the toast of the neighbourhood, a hint of which the toppers were not slow to take advantage, while one of the guests at the recent party observed, "Young Belamour seemed to be of that opinion."

"May it be so," said the Canon, "that were a step to the undoing of a great wrong."

"Mr. Scrivener will tell you, sir, that there was no injustice in the eye of the law," said the Major.

“*Summum jus, summa injuria,*” quoted, *sotto voce*, Mr. Arden, a minor canon who, being well born, scholarly, scientific and gentlemanly, occupied a middle place between his colleagues and the grandees. He was not listened to. Each knot of speakers was becoming louder in debate, and Dr. Boltby’s voice was hardly heard when he announced that a rain of blood had fallen on the Macgillicuddy mountains in Ireland, testified to by numerous respectable Protestant witnesses, and attributable, either to the late comet, or to the Pretender.

At that moment the letters were brought in by the postman, and each recipient had—not without murmurs—to produce his purse and pay heavily for them. There were not many. The Doctor had two, Mr. Arden one, Mr. Scrivener no less than five, but of them two were franked, and a franked letter was likewise handed over to Major Delavie, with the word “Aresfield” written in the corner.

“From my Lady,” said an unoccupied neighbour.

"Aye, aye," said the Major, putting it into his pocket, being by no means inclined to submit the letter to the general gaze.

"A good omen," said Canon Boltby, looking up from his paper. And the Major smiled in return, put a word or two into the discussion on foreign affairs, and then, as soon as he thought he could take leave without betraying anxiety, he limped down stairs, and called for his horse. Lady Belamour's letters were wont to be calls for money, not easily answered, and were never welcome sights, and this hung heavy in the laced pocket of his coat.

Palmer met him at the back gate, and took his horse, but judged it advisable to put no questions about the news, while his master made his way in by the kitchen entrance of the rambling old manor house, and entered a stone-paved low room, a sort of office or study, where he received, and paid, money for my Lady, and smoked his pipe. Here he sat down in his wooden armchair, spread forth his legs, and took out the letter, opening it with careful avoidance of defacing the large red

seal, covered with many quarterings, and the Delavie escutcheon of pretence reigning over all.

It opened, as he expected, with replies to some matters about leases and repairs; and then followed :—

“I am informed that you have a large Family, and Daughters growing up whom it is desirable to put in the way of making a good Match, or else an honourable Livelihood ; I am therefore willing, for the Sake of our Family Connection, to charge myself with your youngest Girl, whose Name I understand to be Aurelia. I will cause her to be trained in useful Works in my Household, expecting her, in Return, to assist in the Care and Instruction of my young Children ; and if she please me and prove herself worthy and attentive, I will bestow her in Marriage upon some suitable Person. This is the more proper and convenient for you, because your Age and Health are such that I may not long be able to retain you in the Charge of my Estate—in which indeed you are continued only out of Consideration of an extremely distant Relationship, although a younger and more active Man,

bred to the Profession, would serve me far more profitably."

When Betty came into the room a few minutes later to pull off her father's boots she found him sitting like one transfixed. He held out the letter, saying, "Read that, child."

Betty stood by the window and read, only giving one start, and muttering between her teeth "Insolent woman!" but not speaking the words aloud, for she knew her father would treat them as treason. He always had a certain tender deference for his cousin Urania, mixed with something akin to compunction, as if his loyalty to his betrothed had been disloyalty to his family. Thus, he exceeded the rest of his sex in blindness to the defects that had been so evident to his wife and daughter; and whatever provocation might make him say of my Lady himself, he never permitted a word against her from any one else. He looked wistfully at Betty and said, "My little Aura! It is a kindly thought. Her son must have writ of the child. But I had liefer she had asked me for the sight of my old eyes."

"The question is," said Betty, in clear, incisive tones, "whether we surrender Aurelia or your situation?"

"Nay, nay, Betty, you always do my cousin less than justice. She means well by the child and by us all. Come, come, say what is in your mind," he added testily.

"Am I at liberty to express myself, sir?"

"Of course you are. I had rather hear the whole discharge of your battery than see you looking constrained and satirical."

"Then, sir, my conclusion is this. The young baronet has shown himself smitten with our pretty Aurelia, and has spoken of tarrying on his return to make farther acquaintance. My Lady is afraid of his going to greater lengths, and therefore wishes to have her at her own disposal."

"She proposes to take her into her own family; that is not taking her out of his way."

"I am not so sure of that."

"You are prejudiced, like your poor dear mother—the best of women, if only she could ever have done justice to her Ladyship! Don't you

see, child, Aurelia would not be gone before his return, supposing he should come this way."

"His visit was to be for six weeks. Did you not see the postscript?"

"No, the letter was enough for one while."

"Here it is: 'I shall send Dove in the Space of about a Fortnight or three Weeks to bring to Town the young Coach Horses you mentioned. His Wife is to return with him, as I have Occasion for her in Town, and your Daughter must be ready to come up with them.'"

"Bless me! That is prompt! But it is thoughtful. Mrs. Dove is a good soul. It seems to me as if my Lady, though she may not choose to say so, wishes to see the child, and if she approve of her, breed her up in the accomplishments needed for such an elevation."

"If you hold that opinion, dear sir, it is well."

"If I thought she meant other than kindness toward the dear maid, I had rather we all pinched together than risk the little one in her hands. I had rather—if it comes to that—live on a crust a day than part with my sweet child; but if it were

for her good, Betty ! It is hard for you all three to be cooped up together here, with no means of improving your condition ; and this may be an opening that I ought not to reject. What say you, Betty ? ”

“ If I were to send her out into the world, I had rather bind her apprentice to the Misses Rigby to learn mantua-making.”

“ Nay, nay, my dear ; so long as I live there is no need for my children to come to such straits.”

“ As long as you retain your situation, sir ; but you perceive how my Lady concludes her letter.”

“ An old song, Betty, which she sings whenever the coin does not come in fast enough to content her. She does not mean what she says ; I know Urania of old. No ; I will write back to her, thanking her for her good offices, but telling her my little girl is too young to be launched into the world as yet. Though if it were Harriet, she might not be unwilling.”

“ Harriet would be transported at the idea ; but it is not she whom my Lady wants. And indeed

I had rather trust little Aurelia to take care of herself than poor Harriet."

"We shall see! We shall see! Meantime, do not broach the subject to your sisters."

Betty assented, and departed with a heavy heart, feeling that, whatever her father might believe, the choice would be between the sacrifice of Aurelia or of her father's agency, which would involve the loss of home, of competence, and of the power of breeding up her darling Eugene according to his birth. She did not even know what her father had written, and could only go about her daily occupations like one under a weight, listening to her sisters' prattle about their little plans with a strange sense that everything was coming to an end, and constantly weighing the comparative evils of yielding or refusing Aurelia.

No one would have more valiantly faced poverty than Elizabeth Delavie, had she alone been concerned. Cavalier and Jacobite blood was in her veins, and her unselfish character had been trained by a staunch and self-devoted mother. But her

father's age and Eugene's youth made her waver. She might work her fingers to the bone, and live on oatmeal, to give her father the comforts he required ; but to have Eugene brought down from his natural station was more than she could endure. His welfare must be secured at the cost not only of Aurelia's sweet presence, but of her happiness ; and Betty durst not ask herself what more she dreaded, knowing too that she would probably be quite incapable of altering her father's determination whatever it might be, and that he was inclined to trust Lady Belamour. The only chance of his refusal was that he should take alarm at the manner of requiring his daughter from him.

CHAPTER V.

THE SUMMONS.

But when the King knew that the thing must be,
And that no help there was in this distress,
He bade them have all things in readiness
To take the maiden out.—MORRIS.

THE second Sunday of suspense had come. The Sundays of good young ladies little resembled those of a century later, though they were not devoid of a calm peacefulness, worthy of the "sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright." The inhabited rooms of the old house looked bright and festal; there were fresh flowers in the beaupots, honey as well as butter on the breakfast table. The Major and Palmer were both in full uniform, wonderfully preserved. Eugene, a marvel of prettiness, with his curled hair and little velvet

coat, contrived by his sisters out of some ancestral hoard. Betty wore thick silk over brocade from the same store ; Harriet a fresh gay chintz over a crimson skirt, and Amelia was in spotless white, with a broad blue sash and blue ribbons in her hat, for her father liked to see her still a child ; so her hair was only tied with blue, while that of her sisters was rolled over a cushion, and slightly powdered.

The church was so near that the Major could walk thither, leaning on his stout crutch-handled stick, and aided by his daughter's arm, as he proceeded down the hawthorn lane, sweet with the breath of May, exchanging greetings with whole families of the poor, the fathers in smock frocks wrought with curious needlework on the breast and back, the mothers in high-crowned hats and stout dark blue woollen gowns, the children, either patched or ragged, and generally barefooted, but by no means ill-fed.

No Sunday school had been invented. The dame who hobbled along in spectacles, dropping a low curtsy to the "quality," taught the horn-

book and the primer to a select few of the progeny of the farmers and artisans, and the young ladies would no more have thought of assisting her labours than the blacksmith's. They only clubbed their pocket money to clothe and pay the schooling of one little orphan, who acknowledged them by a succession of the lowest bobs as she trotted past, proud as Margery Twoshoes herself of the distinction of being substantially shod.

The church was small, and with few pretensions to architecture at the best. It had been nearly a ruin, when, stirred by the Major, the churchwardens had taken it in hand, so that, owing to Richard Stokes and John Ball, as they permanently declared in yellow letters on a blue ground, the congregation were no longer in danger of the roof admitting the rain or coming down on the congregation. They had further beautified the place with a huge board of the royal arms, and with Moses and Aaron in white cauliflower wigs presiding over the tables of the Commandments. Four long dark, timber pews and numerous

benches, ruthlessly constructed out of old carvings, occupied the aisle, and the chancel was more than half filled with the lofty "closet" of the Great House family. Hither the Delavie family betook themselves, and on her way Betty was startled by the recognition, in the seat reserved for the servants, of a broad back and curled wig that could belong to no one but Jonah Dove. She did her utmost to keep her mind from dwelling on what this might portend, though she followed the universal custom by exchanging nods and curtsies with the Duckworth family as she sailed up the aisle at the head of the little procession.

There was always a little doubt as to who would serve the church. One of the Canons was the incumbent, and the curate was Mr. Arden, the scientific minor canon, but when his services were required at the cathedral, one of his colleagues would supply his place, usually in a sadly perfunctory manner. However, he was there in person, as his voice, a clear and pleasant one, showed the denizens of the "closet," for they could not see out of it, except where Eugene had

furtively enlarged a moth-eaten hole in the curtain, through which, when standing on the seat, he could enjoy an oblique view of the back of an iron-moulded surplice and a very ill-powdered wig. This was a comfort to him. It would have been more satisfactory to have been able to make out whence came the stentorian A-men, that responded to the parson, totally unaccompanied save by the good Major, who always read his part almost as loud as the clerk, from a great octavo prayer-book, bearing on the lid the Delavie arms with coronet, supporters, and motto, "*Ma Vie et ma Mie.*" It would have been thought unladylike, if not unscriptural, to open the lips in church; yet, for all her silence, good Betty was striving to be devout and attentive, praying earnestly for her little sister's safety, and hailing as a kind of hopeful augury this verse from the singers—

“ At home, abroad, in peace, in war,
Thy God shall thee defend,
Conduct thee through life's pilgrimage
Safe to thy journey's end.”

Much cannot be said for the five voices that

sang, nor for the two fiddles that accompanied them. Eugene had scarcely outgrown his terror at the strains, and still required Aurelia to hold his hand, under pretext of helping him to follow the words, not an easy thing, since the last lines were always repeated three or four times.

Somehow the repetition brought them the more home to Betty's heart, and they rang consolingly in her ears, all through the sermon, of which she took in so little that she never found out that it was an elaborate exposition of the Newtonian philosophy, including Mr. Arden's views of the miracle at the battle of Beth-horon, in the Lesson for the day.

The red face and Belamour livery looked doubly ominous when she came out of church, but she had to give her arm to her father till they were overtaken by Mr. Arden, who always shared the Sunday roast beef and plum pudding. Betty feared it was the best meal he had in the week, for he lived in lodgings, and his landlady was not too careful of his comforts, while he was wrapped up in his books and experiments. There

was a hole singed in the corner of his black gown, which Eugene pointed out with great awe to Aurelia as they walked behind him.

“See there, Aura. Don't you think he has been raising spirits, like Friar Bacon?”

“What do you know about Friar Bacon?” asked Harriet.

“He is in a little book that I bought of the pedlar. He had a brazen head that said—

‘Time is,
Time was,
Time will be.’

I wonder if Mr. Arden would show me one like it.”

“You ridiculous little fellow to believe such trash!” said Harriet.

“But, Hatty, he can really light a candle without a tinder-box,” said Eugene. “His landlady told Palmer so; and Palmer says the Devil flew away with Friar Bacon; but my book says he burnt all his books and gave himself to the study of divinity, and dug his grave with his own nails.”

“Little boys should not talk of such things on Sundays,” said Harriet, severely.

"One does talk of the Devil on Sunday, for he is in the catechism," returned Eugene. "If he carries Mr. Arden off, do you think there will be a great smoke, and that folk will see it?"

Aurelia's silvery peal of laughter fell sadly upon Betty's ears in front, and her father and Mr. Arden turned to ask what made them so merry. Aurelia blushed in embarrassment, but Harriet was ready.

"You will think us very rude, Sir, but my little brother has been reading the life of Friar Bacon, and he thinks you an equally great philosopher."

"Indeed, my little master, you do me too much honour. You will soon be a philosopher yourself. I did not expect so much attention in so young an auditor," said Mr. Arden, thinking this the effect of his sermon on the solar system.

Whereupon Eugene begged to inspect the grave he was digging with his own nails.

They were at home by this time, and Betty was aware that they had been followed at a respectful distance by Palmer and the coachman. Anxious as she was, she could not bear that her father's dinner should be spoilt, or that he, in

his open-hearted way, should broach the matter with Mr. Arden ; so she repaired to the garden gate, and on being told that Mr. Dove had a packet from my lady for the Major, she politely invited him to dinner with the servants, and promised that her father should see him afterwards.

This gave a long respite, since the servants had the reversion of the beef, so that Mr. Arden had taken leave, and gone to see a bedridden pauper, and the Major had time for his forty winks, while Betty, though her heart throbbed hard beneath her tightly-laced boddice, composed herself to hear Eugene's catechism, and the two sisters, each with a good book, slipped out to the honeysuckle arbour in the garden behind the house. Harriet had *Sherlock on Death*, her regular Sunday study, though she never got any further than the apparition of Mrs. Veal, over which she gloated in a dreamy state ; Aurelia's study was a dark-covered, pale-lettered copy of the *Ikon Basilike*, with the strange attraction that youth has to pain and sorrow, and sat musing over the resigned outpourings of the perplexed and

persecuted king, with her bright eyes fixed on the deep blue sky, and the honeysuckle blossoms gently waving against it, now and then visited by bee or butterfly, while through the silence came the throbbing notes of the nightingale, followed by its jubilant burst of glee, and the sweet distant chime of the cathedral bells rose and fell upon the wind. What peace and repose there was in all the air, even in the gentle breeze, and the floating motions of the swallows skimming past.

The stillness was first broken by the jangle of their own little church bell, for Mr. Arden was a more than usually diligent minister, and always gave two services when he was not in course at the cathedral. The young ladies always attended both, but as Harriet and Aurelia crossed the lawn, their brother ran to meet them, saying, "We are not to wait for sister."

"I hope my papa is well," said Aurelia.

"Oh yes," said Eugene, "but the man in the gold-laced hat has been speaking with him. Palmer says it is Mrs. Dove's husband, and he is going to take Lively Tom and Brown Bet and

the two other colts to London. He asked if I should like to ride a-cockhorse there with him. 'Dearly,' I said, and then he laughed and said it was not my turn, but he should take Miss Aurelia instead."

Aurelia laughed, and Harriet said, "Extremely impudent."

Little she guessed what Betty was at that moment reading.

"I am astonished," wrote Lady Belamour to her cousin, "that you should decline so highly advantageous an Offer for your Daughter. I can only understand it as a Token that you desire no further Connection with, nor Favour from, me; and I shall therefore require of you to give up the Accounts, and vacate the House by Michaelmas next ensuing. However, as I am willing to allow some excuse for the Weakness of parental Affection, if you change your Mind within the next Week and send up your Daughter with Dove and his Wife, I will overlook your first hasty and foolish Refusal, ungrateful as it was, and will receive your Daughter and give her all the Advantages I

promised. Otherwise your Employment is at an end, and you had better prepare your Accounts for Hargrave's Inspection."

"There is no help for it then," said Betty.

"And if it be for the child's advantage, we need not make our moan," said her father. "'Tis like losing the daylight out of our house, but we must not stand in the way of her good."

"If I were only sure it is for her good!"

"Why, child, there's scarce a wench in the county who would not go down on her knees for such a chance. See what Madam Duckworth would say to it for Miss Peggy!"

Betty said no more. The result of her cogitations had been that since Aurelia must be yielded for the sake of her father and Eugene, it was better not to disturb him with fears, which would only anger him at the moment and disquiet him afterwards. She was likewise reassured by Mrs. Dove's going with her, since that good woman had been nurse to the little Belamour cousins now deceased, and was well known as an excellent and trustworthy person, so that, if she were going

to act in the same capacity to my Lady's second family, Aurelia would have a friend at hand. So the Major cheated his grief by greeting the churchgoers with the hilarious announcement—

“Here's great news! What says my little Aura to going to London to my Lady's house.”

“O Sir! are you about to take us.”

“Not I! My Lady wants pretty young maidens, not battered old soldiers.”

“Nor my sisters? O then, if you please, Sir, I would rather not go!”

“Silly children cannot choose! No, no, Aura, you must go out and see the world, and come back to us such a belle that your poor old father will scarce know you.”

“I do not wish to be a belle,” said the girl.

“O Sir, let me stay with you and sister.”

“Do not be so foolish, Aura,” put in Harriet. “It will be the making of you. I wish I had the offer.”

“O Harriet, could not you go instead?”

“No, Aurelia,” said Betty. “There is no choice, and you must be a good girl and not vex my father.”

The gravity of her eldest sister convinced Aurelia that entreaties would be vain, and there was soon a general outburst of assurances that she would see all that was delightful in London, the lions in the Tower, the new St. Paul's, the monuments, Ranelagh, the court ladies, may be, the King and Queen themselves ; until she began to feel exhilarated and pleased at the prospect and the distinction.

Then came Monday and the bustle of preparing her wardrobe. The main body of it was to be sent in the carrier's waggon, for she was to ride on a pillion behind Mr. Dove, and could only take a valise upon a groom's horse. There was no small excitement in the arrangement, and in the farewells to the neighbours, who all agreed with Harriet in congratulating the girl on her promotion. Betty did her part with all her might, washed lace, and trimmed sleeves, and made tuckers, giving little toilette counsels, while her heart ached sorely all the time.

When she could speak to Mrs. Dove alone, she earnestly besought that old friend to look after

the child, her health, her dress, and above all to supply her lack of experience and give her kind counsel and advice.

“I will indeed, ma’am, as though she were my own,” promised Mrs. Dove.

“O nurse, I give my sweet jewel to your care ; you know what a great house in London is better than I do. You will warn her of any danger.”

“I will do my endeavour, ma’am. We servants see and hear much, and if any harm should come nigh the sweet young miss, I’ll do my best for her.”

“Thank you, nurse, I shall bid her listen to you as to me ; I shall never, never see her more in her free artless childishness,” said Betty, sobbing as if her heart would break ; “but oh, nurse, I can bear the thought better since I have known that you would be near her.”

And at night, when her darling nestled for the last time in her arms, the elder sister whispered her warnings. Her knowledge of the great world was limited, but she believed it to be a very wicked place, and she profoundly distrusted her brilliant kinswoman ; yet her warnings took no shape more

definite than—"My dearest sister will never forget her prayers nor her Bible." There was a soft response and fresh embrace at each pause. "Nor play cards of a Sunday, nor ever play high. And my Aura must be deaf to rakish young beaux and their compliments. They never mean well by poor pretty maids. If you believe them, they will only mock, flout, and jeer you in the end. And if the young baronet should seek converse with you, promise me, oh, promise me, Aurelia, to grant him no favour, no, not so much as to hand him a flower, or stand chatting with him unknown to his mother. Promise me again, child, for naught save evil can come of any trifling between you. And, Aurelia, go to Nurse Dove in all your difficulties. She can advise you where your poor sister cannot. It will ease my heart if I know that my child will attend to her. You will not let yourself be puffed up with flattery, nor be offended if she be open and round with you. Think that your poor sister Betty speaks in her. Pray our old prayers, go to church, and read your Psalms and Lessons daily, and oh! never, never

cheat your conscience. O may God, in His mercy, keep my darling!"

So Aurelia cried herself to sleep, while Betty lay awake till the early hour in the morning when all had to be prepared for the start. There was to be a ride of an hour and a half before breakfast so as to give the horses a rest. It was a terrible separation, in many respects more complete than if Aurelia had been going, in these days, to America; for communication by letter was almost as slow, and infinitely more expensive.

No doubt the full import of what he had done had dawned even on Major Delavie during the watches of that last sorrowful night, for he came out a pale, haggard man, looking as if his age had doubled since he went to bed, wrapped in his dressing gown, his head covered with his night-cap, and leaning heavily on his staff. He came charged with one of the long solemn discourses which parents were wont to bestow on their children as valedictions, but when Aurelia, in her camlet riding cloak and hood, brought her tear-stained face to crave his blessing, he could

only utter broken fragments. "Bless thee my child! Take heed to yourself and your ways. It is a bad world, beset with temptations. Oh! heaven forgive me for sending my innocent lamb out into it. Oh! what would your blessed mother say?"

"Dear sir," said Betty, who had wept out her tears, and was steadily composed now, "this is no time to think of that. We must only cheer up our darling, and give her good counsel. If she keep to what her Bible, her catechism and her conscience tell her, she will be a good girl, and God will protect her."

"True, true, your sister is right; Aura, my little sweetheart, I had much to say to you, but it is all driven out of my poor old head."

"Aura! Aura! the horses are coming! Ten of them!" shouted Eugene. "Come along! Oh! if I were but going! How silly of you to cry; I don't."

"There! there! Go my child, and God in His mercy protect you!"

Aurelia in speechless grief passed from the arms

of one sister to the embrace of the other, hugged Eugene, was kissed by Nannerl, who forced a great piece of cake into her little bag, and finally was lifted to her pillion cushion by Palmer, who stole a kiss of her hand before Dove put his horse in motion, while Betty was still commending her sister to his wife's care, and receiving reiterated promises of care.

CHAPTER VI.

DISAPPOINTED LOVE.

I know thee well, thy songs and sighs,
A wicked god thou art ;
And yet, most pleasing to the eyes,
And witching to the heart.

W. MACKWORTH PRAED.

THE house was dull when Aurelia was gone. Her father was ill at ease and therefore testy, Betty too sore at heart to endure as cheerfully as usual his unwonted ill-humour. Harriet was petulant, and Eugene troublesome, and the two were constantly jarring against one another, since the one missed her companion, the other his playmate ; and they were all more sensible than ever how precious and charming an element was lost to the family circle.

On the next ensuing Sunday, Eugene had

made himself extremely obnoxious to Harriet, by persisting in kicking up the dust, and Betty, who had gone on before with her father, was availing herself of the shelter of the great pew to brush with a sharp hand the dust from the little offending legs, when, even in the depths of their seclusion, the whole party were conscious of a sort of breathless sound of surprise and admiration, a sweep of bows and curtsies, and the measured tread of boots and clank of sword and spurs coming nearer—yes, to the very chancel. Their very door was opened by the old clerk with the most obsequious of reverences, and there entered a gorgeous vision of scarlet and gold, bowing gracefully with a wave of a cocked and plumed hat!

The Major started, and was moving out of his corner—the seat of honour—but the stranger forbade this by another gesture, and took his place, after standing for a moment with his face hidden in his hat. Then he took an anxious survey, not without an almost imperceptible elevation of eyebrow and shoulder, as if

disappointed, and accepted the Prayer-book which the Major offered him.

Betty kept her eyes glued to her book, and when that was not in use, upon the mittened hands crossed before her, resolute against distraction, and every prayer turning into a petition for her sister's welfare ; but Eugene gazed, open-eyed and open-mouthed, oblivious of his beloved hole, and Harriet, though keeping her lids down, and her book open, contrived to make a full inspection of the splendid apparition.

It was tall and slight, youthfully undeveloped, yet with the grace of personal symmetry, high breeding, and military training, upright without stiffness, with a command and dexterity of movement which prevented the sword and spurs from being the annoyance to his pew-mates that country awkwardness usually made these appendages. The spurs were on cavalry boots, guarding the knee, and met by white buckskins, both so little dusty that there could have been no journey that morning. The bright gold-laced scarlet coat of the Household troops entirely effaced the Major's old

Austrian uniform; and over it, the hair, of a light golden brown, was brushed back, tied with black ribbon, and hung down far behind in a queue, only leaving little gold rings curling on the brow and temples. The face was modelled like a cameo, faultless in the outlines, with a round peach-like fresh contour and bloom on the fair cheek, which had much of the child, though with a firmness in the lip, and strength in the brow, that promised manliness. Indeed there was a wonderful blending of the beauty of manhood and childhood about the youth; and his demeanour was perfectly decorous and reverent, no small merit in a young officer and London beau. Indeed Betty could almost have forgotten his presence, if gleams from his glittering equipments had not kept glancing before her eyes, turn them where she would, and if Mr. Arden's sermon had not been on Solomon's extent of natural philosophy, and so full of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin that she could not follow it at all.

After the blessing, the young gentleman, with a bow, the pink of courtesy, offered a hand to lead her out, nor could she refuse, though, to use her

own expression, she hated the absurdity of mincing down the aisle with a fine young spark looking like her grandson ; while her poor father had to put up with Harriet's arm. Outside came the greetings, the flourish of the hat, the "I may venture to introduce myself, and to beg of you, sir, and of my fair cousins, to excuse my sudden intrusion."

"No apology can be needed for your appearance in your own pew, Sir Amyas," said the Major with outstretched hand ; "it did my heart good to see you there !"

"I would not have taken you thus by surprise," continued the youth, "but one of my horses lost a shoe yesterday, and we were constrained to halt at Portkiln for the night, and ride on this morning. Herries went on to the Deanery, and I hoped to have seen you before church, but found you had already entered."

Portkiln was so near, that this Sabbath day's journey did not scandalise Betty, and her father eagerly welcomed his kinsman, and insisted that he should go no farther. Sir Amyas accepted the

invitation, nothing loth, only asking, with a little courtly diffidence, if it might not be convenient for him to sleep at the Great House, and begging the ladies to excuse his riding dress.

His eyes wandered anxiously as though in search of something in the midst of all his civility, and while the Major was sending Eugene to bring Mr. Arden—who was hanging back at the church-yard gate, unwilling to thrust himself forward—the faltering question was put, while the cheeks coloured like a girl's, "I hope my fair partner, my youngest cousin, Miss Aurelia Delavie, is in good health?"

"We hope so, sir, thank you," returned Betty; "but she left us six days ago."

"Left you!" he repeated, in consternation that overpowered his courtliness.

"Yes, sir," said Harriet, "my Lady, your mother, has been good enough to send for her to London."

"My Lady!" he murmured to himself; "I never thought of that! How and when did she go?"

The answer was interrupted by the Major coming up. "Sir Amyas Belamour, permit me to

present to you the Reverend Richard Arden, the admirable divine to whom we are beholden for the excellent and learned discourse of this morning. You'll not find such another scholar in all Carminster."

"I am highly honoured," returned the baronet, with a bow in return for Mr. Arden's best obeisance, such as it was; and Harriet, seeing Peggy Duckworth in the distance, plumed herself on her probable envy.

Before dinner was served Sir Amyas had obtained information as to Aurelia's departure, and even as to the road she had taken, and he had confessed that, "Of course he had writ to his mother that he had danced with the most exquisitely beautiful creature he had ever seen, and that he longed to know his cousins better." No doubt his mother, having been thus reminded of her connections, had taken the opportunity of summoning Aurelia to London to give her the advantages of living in her household and acquiring accomplishments. The lad was so much delighted at the prospect of enjoying her society that he was

almost consoled for not finding her at the Manor House; and his elaborate courtesy became every moment less artificial and more affectionate, as the friendly atmosphere revealed that the frankness and simplicity of the boy had not been lost, captain in the dragoon guards as he was, thanks to interest, though he had scarcely yet joined his troop. He had been with a tutor in the country, until two years ago, when his stepfather, Mr. Wayland, had taken him, still with his tutor, on the expedition to the Mediterranean. He had come home from Gibraltar, and joined his regiment only a few weeks before setting out with his friend Captain Herries, to visit Battlefield, Lady Aresfield's estate in Monmouthshire. He was quartered in the Whitehall barracks, but could spend as much time as he pleased at his mother's house in Hanover Square.

Betty's mind misgave her as she saw the brightening eye with which he said it; but she could not but like the youth himself, he was so bright, unspoilt, and engaging that she could not think him capable of doing wilful wrong to her

darling. Yet how soon would the young soldier, plunged into the midst of fashionable society, learn to look on the fair girl with the dissipated eyes of his associates? There was some comfort in finding that Mr. Wayland was expected to return in less than a year, and that his stepson seemed to regard him with unbounded respect, as a good, just, and wise man, capable of everything! Indeed Sir Amyas enlightened Mr. Arden on the scientific construction of some of Mr. Wayland's inventions so as to convince both the clergyman and the soldier that the lad himself was no fool, and had profited by his opportunities.

Major Delavie produced his choice Tokay, a present from an old Hungarian brother-officer, and looked happier than since Aurelia's departure. He was no match-maker, and speculated on no improbable contingencies for his daughter, but he beheld good hopes for the Delavie property and tenants in an heir such as this, and made over his simple loyal heart to the young man. Presently he inquired whether the unfortunate Mr. Belamour still maintained his seclusion.

“Yes, sir,” was the reply. “He still lives in two dark rooms with shutters and curtains excluding every ray of light. He keeps his bed for the greater part of the day, but sometimes, on a very dark night, will take a turn on the terrace.”

“Poor gentleman!” said Betty. “Has he no employment or occupation?”

“Mr. Wayland contrived a raised chess and draught board, and persuaded him to try a few games before we went abroad, but I do not know whether he has since continued it.”

“Does he admit any visits?”

“Oh no. He has been entirely shut up, except from the lawyer, Hargrave, on business. Mr. Wayland, indeed, strove to rouse him from his despondency, but without success, except that latterly he became willing to receive him.”

“Have you ever conversed with him?”

There was an ingenuous blush as the young man replied. “I fear I must confess myself remiss. Mr. Wayland has sometimes carried me with him to see my uncle, but not with my good

will, and my mother objected lest it should break my spirits. However, when I left Gibraltar, my good father charged me to endeavour from time to time to enliven my uncle's solitude, but there were impediments to my going to him, and I take shame to myself for not having striven to overcome them."

"Rightly spoken, my young kinsman," cried the Major. "There are no such impediments as a man's own distaste."

"And pity will remove that," said Betty.

Soon after the removal of the cloth the ladies withdrew, and Eugene was called to his catechism, but he was soon released, for the Tokay had made her father sleepy, while it seemed to have emboldened Mr. Arden, since he came forth with direct intent to engross Harriet; and Sir Amyas wandered towards Betty, apologising for the interruption.

"It is a rare occasion," said she as her pupil scampered away.

"Happy child, to be taught by so good a sister," said the young baronet, regretfully.

“Your young half-brothers and sisters must be of about the same age,” said Betty.

“My little brother, Archer, is somewhat younger. He is with my mother in London, the darling of the ladies, who think him a perfect beauty, and laugh at all his mischievous pranks. As to my little sisters, you will be surprised to hear that I have only seen them once, when I rode with their father to see them at the farm houses at which they are nursed.”

“No doubt they are to be fetched home, since Mrs. Dove is gone to wait on them, and my Lady said something of intending my sister to be with her young children.”

“Nay, she must have no such troublesome charge. My mother cannot intend anything of the kind. I shall see that she is treated as—”

Betty, beginning to perceive that he knew as little of his own mother as did the rest of his sex, here interrupted him. “Excuse me, sir, I doubt not of your kind intentions, but let me speak, for Aurelia is a very precious child to me, and I am afraid that any such attempt on your part might

do her harm rather than good, She must be content with the lot of a poor dependant."

"Never!" he exclaimed. "She is a Delavie; and besides, no other ever shall be my wife."

"Hush, hush!" Betty had been saying before the words were out of his mouth. "You are but a silly boy, begging your Honour's pardon, though you speak, I know, with all your heart. What would your Lady mother say or do to my poor little sister if she heard you?"

"She could but send her home, and then flood and fire could not hold me from her."

"I wish that were the worst she could do. No, Sir Amyas Belamour, if you have any kindness for the poor helpless girl under your mother's roof, you will make no advance to excite alarm or anger against her. Remember it is she who will be the sufferer and not yourself. The woman, however guiltless, is sure to fall under suspicion and bear the whole penalty. And oh! what would become of her, defenceless, simple, unprotected as she is?"

"Yet you sent her!" said he.

“Yes,” said Betty, sadly, “because there was no other choice between breaking with my Lady altogether.”

He made an ejaculation under his breath, half sad, half violent, and exclaimed, “Would that I were of age, or my father were returned.”

“But now you know all, you will leave my child in peace,” said Betty.

“What, you would give me no hope!”

“Only such as you yourself have held out,” said Betty. “When you are your own master, if you keep in the same mind till then, and remain truly worthy, I cannot tell what my father would answer.”

“I am going to speak to him this very day. I came with that intent.”

“Do no such thing, I entreat,” cried Betty. “He would immediately think it his duty to inform my Lady. Then no protestation would persuade her that we had not entrapped your youth and innocence. His grey head would be driven out without a shelter, and what might not be the consequence to my sister? You

could not help us, and could only make it worse. No, do nothing rash, incautious, or above all, disobedient. It would be self-love, not true love that would risk bringing her into peril and trouble when she is far out of reach of all protection."

"Trust me, trust me, Cousin Betty," cried the youth. "Only let me hope, and I'll be caution itself; but oh! what an endless eternity is two years to wait without a sign!"

But here appeared the Major, accompanied by Captain Herries and Dean Churchill, who had ordered out his coach, Sunday though it were, to pay his respects to my Lady's son, and carry him and his hosts back to sup at the Deanery. It was an age of adulation, but Betty was thankful that perilous conversations were staved off.

CHAPTER VII.

ALL ALONE.

By the simplicity of Venus' doves.

Merchant of Venice.

THAT Sunday was spent by Aurelia at the Bear Inn, at Reading. Her journey had been made by very short stages, one before breakfast, another lasting till noon, when there was a long halt for dinner and rest for horse and rider, and then another ride, never even in these longest summer days prolonged beyond six or seven o'clock at latest, such was the danger of highwaymen being attracted by the valuable horses, although the grooms in charge were so well armed that they might almost as well have been troopers.

The roads, at that time of year, were at their best, and Aurelia and Mrs. Dove were mounted on

steady old nags, accustomed to pillions. Aurelia could have ridden single, but this would not have been thought fitting on a journey with no escort of her own rank, and when she mounted she was far too miserable to care for anything but hiding her tearful face behind Mr. Dove's broad shoulders. Mrs. Dove was perched behind a wiry, lightweighted old groom, whom she kept in great order, much to his disgust.

After the first wretchedness, Aurelia's youthful spirits had begun to revive, and the novel scenes to awaken interest. The Glastonbury thorn was the first thing she really looked at. The Abbey was to her only an old Gothic melancholy ruin, not worthy of a glance, but the breezy air of the Cheddar hills, the lovely cliffs, and the charm of the open country, with its strange islands of hills dotted about, raised her spirits, as she rode through the meadows where hay was being tossed, and the scent came fragrant on the breeze. Mr. Dove would tell her over his shoulder the names of places and their owners when they came to parks bordering the road, and castles "bosomed

high in tufted trees." Or he would regale her with legends of robberies and point to the frightful gibbets, one so near to the road that she shut her eyes and crouched low behind him to avoid seeing the terrible burthen. She had noted the White Horse, and shuddered at the monument at Devizes commemorating the judgment on the lying woman, and a night had been spent at Marlborough that "Miss" might see a strolling company of actors perform in a barn; but as the piece was the *Yorkshire Tragedy*, the ghastly performance overcame her so completely that Mrs. Dove had to take her away, declaring that no inducement should ever take her to a theatre again.

Mr. Dove was too experienced a traveller not to choose well his quarters for the night, and Aurelia slept in guest chambers shining with cleanliness and scented with lavender, Mrs. Dove always sharing her room. "Miss" was treated with no small regard, as a lady of the good old blood, and though the coachman and his wife talked freely with her, they paid her all observance, never ate at the same table, and provided assidu-

ously for her comfort and pleasure. Once they halted a whole day because even Mr. Dove was not proof against the allurements of a bull-baiting, though he carefully explained that he only made a concession to the grooms to prevent them from getting discontented, and went himself to the spectacle to hinder them from getting drunk, in which, be it observed, he did not succeed.

So much time was spent on thus creeping from stage to stage that Aurelia had begun to feel as if the journey had been going on for ages, and as if worlds divided her from her home, when on Sunday she timidly preceded Mrs. Dove into Reading Abbey Church, and afterwards was shown where rolled Father Thames. The travellers took early morning with them for Maidenhead Thicket, and breakfasted on broiled trout at the King's Arms at Maidenhead Bridge, while Aurelia felt her eye filled with the beauty of the broad glassy river, and the wooded banks, and then rode onwards, looking with loyal awe at majestic Windsor, where the flag was flying. They slept at a poor little inn at Longford, rather than cross

Hounslow Heath in the evening, and there heard all the last achievements of the thieves, so that Aurelia, in crossing the next day, looked to see a masked highwayman start out of every bush ; but they came safely to the broad archway of the inn at Knightsbridge, their last stage. Mrs. Dove took her charge up stairs at once to refresh her toilette, before entering London and being presented to my Lady.

But a clattering and stamping were heard in the yard, and Aurelia, looking from the window, called Mrs. Dove to see four horses being harnessed to a coach that was standing there.

“Lawk-a-day!” cried the good woman, “if it be not our own old coach, as was the best in poor Sir Jovian’s time! Ay, there be our colours, you see, blue and gold, and my Lady’s quartering. Why, ’twas atop of that very blue hammercloth that I first set eyes on my Dove! So my Lady has sent to meet you, Missie. Well, I do take it kind of her. Now you will not come in your riding hood, all frowsted and dusty, but can put on your pretty striped sacque and blue hood that you wore on

Sunday, and look the sweet pretty lady you are."

Mrs. Dove's intentions were frustrated, for the maid of the inn knocked at the door with a message that the coach had orders not to wait, but that Miss was to come down immediately.

"Dear, dear!" sighed Mrs. Dove. "Tell the jackanapes not to be so hasty. He must give the young lady time to change her dress, and eat a mouthful."

This brought Dove up to the door. "Never mind dressing and fallals," he said; "this is a strange fellow that says he is hired for the job, and his orders are precise. Miss must take a bit of cake in her hand. Come, dame, you have not lived so long in my Lady's service as to forget what it is to cross her will, or keep her waiting."

Therewith he hurried Aurelia down stairs, his wife being in such a state of *déshabille* that she could not follow. He handed the young lady into the carriage, gave her a parcel of slices of

bread and meat, with a piece of cake, shut the door, and said, "Be of good heart, Missie, we'll catch you up by the time you are in the square. All right!"

Off went Aurelia in solitude, within a large carriage, once gaily fitted though now somewhat faded and tarnished. She was sorry to be parted from the Doves, whom she wanted to give her courage for the introduction to my Lady, and to explain to her the wonders of the streets of London, which she did not *quite* expect to see paved with gold! She ate her extemporised meal, gazing from the window, and expecting to see houses and churches thicken on her, and hurrying to brush away her crumbs, and put on her gloves lest she should arrive unawares, for she had counted half-a-dozen houses close together. No! here was another field! More fields and houses. The signs of habitation were, so far from increasing, growing more scanty, and looked strangely like what she had before passed. Could this be the right road? How foolish to doubt, when this was my Lady's own coach. But oh, that it had

waited for Mrs. Dove! She would beg her to get in when the riders overtook her. When would they? No sign of them could be seen from the windows, and here were more houses. Surely this was Turnham Green again, or there must be another village green exactly like it in the heart of London. How many times did not poor Aurelia go through all these impressions in the course of her drive. She was absolutely certain that she was taken through Brentford again, this time without a halt; but after this the country became unknown to her, and the road much worse. It was in fact for the most part a mere ditch or cart track, so rough that the four horses came to a walk. Aurelia had read no novels but *Télémaque* and *Le Grand Cyrus*, so her imagination was not terrified by tales of abduction, but alarm began to grow upon her. She much longed to ask the coachman whither he was taking her, but the check string had been either worn out or removed; she could not open the door from within, nor make him hear, and indeed she was a little afraid of him.

Twilight began to come on ; it was much later than Mr. Dove had ever ventured to be out, but here at last there was a pause, and the swing of a gate, the road was smoother and she seemed to be in a wood, probably private ground. On and on, for an apparently interminable time, went the coach with the wearied and affrighted girl, through the dark thicket, until at last she emerged, into a park, where she could again see the pale after-glow of the sunset, and presently she found herself before a tall house, perfectly dark, with strange fantastic gables and chimneys, ascending far above against the sky.

All was still as death, except the murmuring caws of the rooks in their nests, and the chattering shriek of a startled blackbird. The servant from behind ran up the steps and thundered at the door ; it was opened, a broad line of light shone out, some figures appeared, and a man in livery came forward to open the carriage door, but to Aurelia's inexpressible horror, his face was perfectly black, with negro features, rolling eyes, and great white teeth !

She hardly knew what she did, the dark carriage was formidable on one side, the apparition on the other! The only ray of comfort was in the face of a stout, comely, rosy maid-servant, who was holding the candle on the threshold, and with one bound the poor traveller dashed past the black hand held out to help her, and rushing up to the girl, caught hold of her, and gasped out, "Oh! What is that? Where am I? Where have they taken me?"

"Lawk, ma'am," said the girl, with a broad grin, "that 'ere bees only Mr. Jumbo. A' won't hurt'ee. See, here's Mistress Aylward."

A tall, white-capped, black-gowned elderly woman turned on the new-comer a pale, grave, unsmiling face, saying, "Your servant—Miss Aurelia Delavie, as I understand."

Bending her head, and scarcely able to steady herself, for she was shaking from head to foot, Aurelia managed to utter the query,

"Where am I?"

"At Bowstead Park, madam, by order of my Lady."

Much relieved, and knowing this was the Belamour estate, Aurelia said, "Please let me wait till Mrs. Dove comes before I am presented to my Lady."

"My Lady is not here, madam," said Mrs. Aylward. "Allow me—" and she led the way across a great empty hall, that seemed the vaster for its obscurity, then along a matted passage, and down some steps into a room surrounded with presses and cupboards, evidently belonging to the housekeeper. She set a chair for the trembling girl, saying, "You will excuse the having supper here to-night, madam; the south parlour will be ready for you to-morrow."

"Is not Mrs. Dove coming?" faintly asked Aurelia.

"Mrs. Dove is gone to London to attend on little Master Wayland. You are to be here with the young ladies, ma'am."

"What young ladies?" asked the bewildered maiden.

"My Lady's little daughters—the Misses Wayland. I thought she had sent you her

instructions ; but I see you are over wearied and daunted," she added, more kindly ; "you will be better when you have taken some food. Molly, I say, you sluggard of a wench, bring the lady's supper, and don't stand gaping there."

Mrs. Aylward hurried away to hasten operations, and Aurelia began somewhat to recover her senses, though she was still so much dismayed that she dreaded to look up lest she should see something frightful, and started at the first approach of steps.

A dainty little supper was placed before her, but she was too faint and sick at heart for appetite, and would have excused herself. However, Mrs. Aylward severely said she would have no such folly, filled a glass of wine, and sternly administered it ; then setting her down in a large chair, helped her to a delicate cutlet. She ate for very fright, but her cheeks and eyes were brightened, the mists of terror and exhaustion began to clear away, and when she accepted a second help, she had felt herself reassured that she had not fallen into unkindly hands. If she

could only have met a smile she would have been easier, but Mrs. Aylward was a woman of sedate countenance and few words, and the straight set line of lips encouraged no questioning, so she merely uttered thanks for each act of hospitality.

“There! You will take no more roll? You are better, now, but you will not be sorry to go to your bed,” said Mrs. Aylward, taking up a candle, and guiding her along the passage up a long stair to a pretty room wainscoted and curtained with fresh white dimity, and the window showing the young moon pale in the light of the western sky.

Bedrooms were little furnished, and this was more luxurious than the dear old chamber at home, but the girl had never before slept alone, and she felt unspeakably lonely in the dreariness, longing more than ever for Betty’s kiss—even for Betty’s blame—or for a whine from Harriet; and she positively hungered for a hug from Eugene, as she gazed timidly at the corners beyond the influence of her candle; and instead of

unpacking the little riding mail she kissed it, and laid her cheek on it as the only thing that came from home, and burst into a flood of despairing tears.

In the midst, there fell on her ears a low strain of melancholy music rising and falling like the wailing of mournful spirits. She sprang to her feet and stood listening with dilated eyes; then, as a louder note reached her, in terror uncontrollable, she caught up her candle, rushed down the stairs like a wild bird, and stood panting before Mrs. Aylward, who had a big Bible open on the table before her.

"Oh, ma'am," she cried, between her panting sobs, "I can't stay there! I shall die!"

"What means this, madam?" said Mrs. Aylward, stiffly, making the word sound much like "foolish child."

"The—the music!" she managed faintly to utter, falling again into the friendly chair.

"The music?" said Mrs. Aylward, considering; then with a shade of polite contempt, "O! Jumbo's fiddle! I did not know it could be heard in

your room, but no doubt the windows below are open."

"Is Jumbo that black man?" asked Aurelia, shuddering; for negro servants, though the fashion in town, had not penetrated into the west.

"Mr. Belamour's blackamoor. He often plays to him half the night."

"Oh!" with another quivering sound of alarm; "is Mr. Belamour the gentleman in the dark?"

"Even so, madam, but you need have no fears. He keeps his room and admits no one, though he sometimes walks out by night. You will only have to keep the children from making a noise near his apartments. Good night, madam."

"Oh, pray, if I do not disturb you, would you be pleased to let me stay till you have finished your chapter; I might not be so frightened then."

In common humanity Mrs. Aylward could not refuse, and Aurelia sat silently grasping the arms of her chair, and trying to derive all the comfort she could from the presence of a Bible and

a good woman. Her nerves were, in fact, calmed by the interval, and when Mrs. Aylward took off her spectacles and shut up her book, it had become possible to endure the terrors of the lonely chamber.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ENCHANTED CASTLE.

A little she began to lose her fear.—MORRIS.

AURELIA slept till she was wakened by a bounce at the door, and the rattling of the lock, but it was a little child's voice that was crying, "I will ! I will ! I will go in and see my cousin !"

Then came Mrs. Aylward's severe voice : "No, miss, you are not to waken your cousin. Come away. Where is that slut, Jenny?"

Then there was a scuffle and a howl, as if the child were being forcibly carried away. Aurelia sprang out of bed, for sunshine was flooding the room, and she felt accountable for tardiness. She had made some progress in dressing, when again little hands were on the lock, little feet

kicking the door, and little voices calling, "Let me in."

She opened the door, and at sight of her, three small figures in round night caps, and white nightgowns, all tumbled back one over the other.

"My little cousins," she said, "come and kiss me."

One came forward, and lifted up a sweet little pale face, but the other two stood, each with a finger in the mouth, right across the threshold, in a manner highly inconvenient to Aurelia, who was only in her stiff stays and dimity petticoat, with a mass of hair hanging down below her waist. She turned to them with arms outstretched, but this put them instantly to the rout, and they ran off as fast as their bare pink feet could carry them, till one stumbled, and lay with her face down and her plump legs kicking in the air. Aurelia caught her up, but the capture produced a powerful yell, and out, all at once, hurried into the corridor, Mrs. Aylward, a tidy maid servant, a stout, buxom countrywoman, and a rough girl, scarcely out of bed, but awake

enough to snatch the child out of the young lady's arms, and carry her off. The housekeeper began scolding vigorously all round, and Aurelia escaped into her own room, where she completed her toilette, looking out into a garden below, laid out in the formal Dutch fashion, with walks and beds centring in a fountain, the grass plats as sharply defined as possible, and stiff yews and cypresses dotted at regular intervals, or forming straight alleys. She felt strange and shy, but the sunshine, the cheerfulness, and the sight of the children, had reassured her, and when she had said her morning prayer, she had lost the last night's sense of hopeless dreariness and unprotectedness. When another knock came, she opened the door cheerfully, but there was a chill in meeting Mrs. Aylward's grave, cold face, and stiff salutation. "If you are ready, madam," she said, "I will show you to the south parlour, where your breakfast is served, and where the children will eat with you."

Aurelia ventured to ask about her baggage, and was told that it would be forwarded from

Brentford. Mrs. Aylward then led the way to a wide stone staircase, with handsome carved balusters, leading down into the great hall, with doors opening from all sides. All was perfectly empty, and so still, that the sweep of the dresses, and the tap of the heels made an echo; and the sunshine, streaming in at the large windows, marked out every one upon the floor, in light and shadow, and exactly repeated the brown-shaded, yellow-framed medallions of painted glass upon the pavement. There was something awful and oppressive in the entire absence of all tokens of habitation, among those many closed doors.

One, however, at the foot of the stairs was opened by Mrs. Aylward. It led to a sort of narrow lobby, with a sashed window above a low door, opening on stone steps down to the terrace and garden. To the right was an open door, giving admittance to a room hung with tapestry, with a small carpet in the centre of the floor, and a table prepared for the morning meal. There was a certain cheerfulness about it, though

it was bare of furniture ; but there was an easy chair, a settee, a long couch, a spinnet, and an embroidery frame, so that altogether it had capabilities of being lived in.

“Here you will sit, madam, with the young ladies,” said Mrs. Aylward. “They have a maid-servant who will wait on you, and if you require anything, you will be pleased to speak to me. My Lady wishes you to take charge of them, and likewise to execute the piece of embroidery you will find in that frame, with the materials. This will be your apartment, and you can take the young ladies into the garden and park, wherever you please, except that they must not make a noise before the windows of the other wing, which you will see closed with shutters, for those are Mr. Belamour's rooms.”

With these words Mrs. Aylward curtsied as if about to retire, Aurelia held out her hand in entreaty. “Oh, cannot you stay with me?”

“No, madam, my office is the housekeeper's,” was the stiff response. “Molly will call me if you require my services. I think you said you

preferred bread and milk for breakfast. Dinner will be served at one."

Mrs. Aylward retreated, leaving a chill on the heart of the lonely girl.

She was a clergyman's widow, though with no pretensions to gentility, and was a plain, conscientious, godly woman, but with the narrow self-concentrated piety of the time, which seemed to ignore all the active part of the duty to our neighbour. She had lived many years as a faithful retainer to the Belamour family, and avoided perplexity by minding no one's business but her own, and that thoroughly. Naturally reserved, and disapproving much that she saw around her, she had never held it to be needful to do more than preserve her own integrity, and the interests of her employers, and she made it a principle to be in no wise concerned in family affairs, and to hold aloof from perilous confidences.

Thus Aurelia was left to herself, till three bowls of milk were borne in by Molly, who was by no means loth to speak.

"The little misses will be down directly,

ma'am," she said, "that is, two on 'em. The little one, she won't leave Jenny Bowles, but Dame Wheatfield, she'll bring down the other two. You see, ma'am, they be only just taken home from being out at nurse, and don't know one another, nor the place, and a pretty handful we shall have of 'em."

Here came a call for Molly, and the girl, with a petulant exclamation, sped away, leaving Aurelia to the society of the tapestry. It was of that set of Gobelin work which represents the four elements personified by their goddesses, and Aurelia's mythology, founded on Fénelon, was just sufficient to enable her to recognise the forge of Vulcan and car of Venus. Then she looked at the work prepared for her, a creamy piece of white satin, and a most elaborate pattern of knots of roses, lilacs, hyacinths, and laburnums, at which her heart sank within her. However, at that moment the stout woman she had seen in the morning appeared at the open door with a little girl in each hand, both in little round muslin caps, long white frocks, and blue sashes.

One went up readily to Aurelia and allowed herself to be kissed, and lifted to a chair; the other clung to Dame Wheatfield, in spite of coaxing entreaties. "Speak pretty, my dear; speak to the pretty lady. Don't ye see how good your sister is? It won't do, miss," to Aurelia; "she's daunted, is my pretty lamb. If I might just give her her breakwist—for it is the last time I shall do it—then she might get used to you before my good man comes for me."

Aurelia was only too glad to instal Dame Wheatfield in a chair with her charge upon her lap. The other child was feeding herself very tidily and independently, and Aurelia asked her if she were the eldest.

"Yes," she said.

"And what shall I call you, my dear?"

"I'm Missy."

"No, Missy, me—me eldest," cried the other.

"Bless the poor children!" exclaimed Mrs. Wheatfield, laughing, "they be both of 'em eldest, as one may say."

“ They are twins, then ? ” said Aurelia.

“ More than that—all three of them came together ! I’ve heard tell of such a thing once or twice, but never of all living and thriving. Folk said it was a judgment on my Lady that she spoke sharp and hard to a poor beggar woman with a child on each arm. It was not a week out before my Lady herself was down, quite unexpected, as I may say, for she was staying here for a week, with a lot of company, when these three was born. They do say she was nigh beside herself that the like of that should have happened to her. Mr. Wayland, he was not so ill pleased, but the poor little things had to be got out of the house any way, for she could not abear to hear of them. Mrs. Rolfe, as was an old servant of the family, took that one, and I was right glad to have you, my pretty one, for I had just lost my babe at a fortnight old, and the third was sent to Goody Bowles, for want of a better. They says as how my Lady means to bring them out one by one, and to make as if they came like other children, as this here is bigger, and the other up stairs is

lesser, and never let on that they are all of an age."

The good gossip must have presumed greatly on the children's want of comprehension if she did not suppose that they understood her at least as well as the young lady to whom her dialect was strange.

"And has she not seen them?"

"Never till last Monday, if you'll believe me miss, when she drove down in her coach, and the children were all brought home. I thought she might have said something handsome, considering the poor little babe as my Missy here was when I had her—not so long as my hand—and scarce able to cry enough to show she was alive. The work I and my good man had with her! He would walk up and down half the night with her. Not as we grudged it. He is as fond of the child as myself; and Mr. Wayland, he knew it. 'She has a good nurse, dame,' says he to me, with the water in his eyes, before he went to foreign parts. But my Lady! When the little one as had been with Goody Bowles—an

ignorant woman, you see—cried and clung to her, and kicked, ‘Little savages all,’ says my Lady. There was thanks to them that had had more work to rear her children than ever with one of their own! ‘Perfect little rustics!’ she said, even when you made your curtsy as pretty as could be, didn’t you, my little lammie?”

“Mammy Rolfe taught me to make my curtsy like a London lady,” said the other child, the most advanced in manners.

“Aha! little pitchers have long ears; but, bless you, they don’t know what it means,” said Dame Wheatfield, too glad to talk to check herself on any account; “Not so much as a kiss for them, poor little darlings! Folks say she does not let even Master Wayland kiss aught but her hands for fear of her fine colours. A plague on such colours, I say.”

“Poor little things!” whispered Aurelia.

“You’ll be good to them, won’t you miss?”

“Indeed I hope so! I am only just come from home, and they will be all I have to care for here.”

“ Ay, you must be lonesome in this big place; but I’m right glad to have seen you, miss; I can part with the little dear with a better heart, for Mrs. Aylward don’t care for children, and Jenny Bowles is a rough wench, wrapped up in her own child, and won’t be no good to the others. Go to the lady, my precious,” she added, trying to put the little girl into her cousin’s lap, but this was met with struggles, and vehement cries of—

“ No; stay with mammy!”

The little sister, who had not brought her nurse, was, however, well contented to be lifted to Aurelia’s knee, and returned her caresses.

“ And have you not a name, my dear? We can’t call you all missie.”

“ Fay,” the child lisped; “ Fayfiddly Wayland.”

“ Lawk-a-daisy!” and Mrs. Wheatfield fell back laughing. “ I’ll tell you how it was, ma’am. When no one thought they would live an hour, Squire Wayland he sent for parson and had ’em half baptised Faith, Hope, and Charity. They says his own mother’s was called Faith, and the

other two came natural after it, and would do as well to be buried by as aught. So that's what she means by Fay, and this here is Miss Charity."

"She said something besides Faith."

"Well, when my lady got about again, they say if she was mad at their coming all on a heap, she was madder still at their names. Bible wasn't grand enough for her! I did hear tell that she throwed her slipper at her husband's head, and was like to go into fits. So to content her he came down, and took each one to Church, and had a fine London name of my Lady's choosing tacked on in parson's register for them to go by; but to my mind it ain't like their christened name. Mine here got called for her share Amoretta."

"A little Love," cried Aurelia. "Oh, that is pretty. And what can your name be, my dear little Fay? Will you tell me again?"

When repeated, it was plainly Fidelia, and it appeared that Hope had been also called Letitia. As to age, Mrs. Wheatfield knew it was five years last Michaelmas since the child had been brought to her from whom she was so loth to

part that she knew not how to go when her husband came for her in his cart. He was a farmer, comfortably off, though very homely, and there were plenty of children at home, so that she had been ill spared to remain at the Park till Aurelia's arrival. Thus she took the opportunity of going away while the little one was asleep.

Aurelia asked where she lived now. At Sed-hurst, in the next parish, she was told ; but she would not accept a promise that her charge should soon be brought to visit her. "Better not, ma'am, thank you all the same, not till she's broke in. She'll pine the less if she don't see nor hear nothing about the old place, nor Daddy and Sally and Davie. If you bring her soon, you'll never get her away again. That's the worst of a nurse-child. I was warned. It just breaks your heart !"

So away went the good foster-mother sobbing ; and Aurelia's charge began. Fay claimed her instantly to explore the garden and house. The child had been sent home alone on the sudden

illness of her nurse, and had been very forlorn, so that her cousin's attention was a great boon to her. Hope was invited to come out; but Jenny Bowles kept a jealous watch over her, and treated every one else as an enemy; and before Aurelia's hat was on, came the terrible woe of Amoret's awakening. Her sobs and wailings for her mammy were entirely beyond the reach of Aurelia's soothings and caresses, and were only silenced by Molly's asseveration that the black man was at the door ready to take her into the dark room. That this was no phantom was known to the poor child, and was a lurking horror to Aurelia herself. No wonder that the little thing clung to her convulsively, and would not let her hand go for the rest of the day, every now and then moaning out entreaties to go home to mammy.

With the sad little being hanging to her hand, Aurelia was led by Fay round their new abiding place. The house was of brick, shaped like the letter H, Dutch, and with a tall wing, at each end of the main body, projecting, and finishing in

fantastic gables edged with stone. One of these square wings was appropriated to Aurelia and her charges, the other to the recluse Mr. Belamour. The space that lay between the two wings, on the garden front, was roofed over, and paved with stone, descending in several broad shallow steps to a broad terrace, which again had stone steps at the centre and ends, guarded at each angle by huge carved eagles, the crest of the builder, Sir Jovian. Below lay the garden, like a piece of the most regular patchwork, and kept, in spite of the owner's non-residence, in perfect order. The strange thing was that this fair and stately place, basking in the sunshine of early June, should be left in complete solitude save for the hermit in the opposite wing, the three children, and the girl, who felt as though in a kind of prison.

The sun was too hot for Aurelia to go out of doors till late in the day, when the shadow of the house came over the steps. She was sitting on one, with Amoret nestled in her lap, and was crooning an old German lullaby of Nannerl's,

which seemed to have a wonderful effect in calming the child, who at last fell into a dose. Aurelia had let her voice die away, and had begun to think over her strange situation, when she was startled by a laugh behind her, and looking round, hardly repressed a start or scream, at the sight of Fay enjoying a game at bo-peep, with—yes—it actually was—the negro—over the low-sashed door.

“I beg pardon, ma’am,” said Jumbo, twitching his somewhat grizzled wool; “I heard singing, and little missy—”

Unfortunately Amoret here awoke, and with a shriek of horror cowered in her arms.

“I am so sorry,” said Aurelia, anxious not to hurt his feelings. “She knows no better.”

Jumbo grinned, bowed, and withdrew, Fay running after him, for she had made friends with him during her days of solitude, being a fearless child, and not having been taught to make a bugbear of him. “The soot won’t come off,” she said.

Aurelia had not a moment to herself till Fay

had said the Lord's prayer at her knee, and Amoret, with much persuasion, had been induced to lisp out—

“ Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed I sleep upon ;
Four corners to my bed,
Four angels round my head,
One to read and one to write,
And two to guard my soul all night.”

Another agony for mammy ensued, nor could Aurelia leave the child till sleep had hushed the wailings. Then only could she take her little writing-case to begin her letter to Betty. It would be an expensive luxury to her family, but she knew how it would be longed for ; and though she cried a good deal over her writing, she felt as if she ought to make the best of her position, for had not Betty said it was for her father's sake? No, her tears must not blot the paper, to distress those loving hearts. Yet how the drops *would* come, gathering fast and blinding her ! Presently, through the window, came the sweet mysterious strains of the violin, not terrifying her as before, but filling her with an inex-

pressible sense of peace and calmness. She sat listening almost as one in a dream, with her pen suspended, and when the spell was broken by Molly's entrance with her, supper, she went on in a much more cheerful strain than she had begun. It was dull, and it was a pity that her grand wardrobe, to say nothing of Betty's good advice, should be wasted, but her sister would rejoice in her seclusion from the grand, fashionable world, and her heart went out to the poor little neglected children, whose mother could not bear the sight of them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRIAD.

“ I know sisters, sisters three.”

ERE many days had passed Aurelia had drifted into what would now be regarded as the duties of a nursery governess to her little companions.

Fay and Amoret were always with her, and depended on her for everything. Jenny Bowles, with a sort of animal jealousy, tried to monopolise her charge, Letitia. The child was attracted by the sounds of her sisters' sports, and there was no keeping her from them, or from their cousin. Then the rude untaught Jenny became cross, moped, showed spite to the other children, and insolence to the young lady, and was fortunately overheard by Mrs. Aylward, and dismissed. Letty did not seem to mind the loss as Amoret had

felt that of her foster-mother, for indeed Jenny had been almost as disagreeable to her as to the others during these days of jealousy.

The triad were not much alike: Amoret was the largest of the three, plump, blue-eyed, golden-haired, rosy-cheeked, a picture of the cherub-type of child; Letitia had the delicate Delavie features and complexion; and Fidelia, the least pretty, was pale, and rather sallow, with deep blue eyes set under a broad forehead and dark brows, with hair also dark. Though the smallest, she was the most advanced, and showed signs of good training. She had some notion of good manners, and knew as much of her hornbook and catechism as little girls of five were wont to know. The other two were perfectly ignorant, but Mrs. Aylward procured hornbooks, primers, and slates, and Aurelia began their education in a small way.

It was a curious life. There was the great empty house, through whose long corridors and vacant rooms the children might wander at will, peeping at the swathed curtains of velvet pile, the rolls of carpet, and the tapestry pictures on the

walls, running and shouting in the empty passages, or sometimes, in a fit of nameless fright, taking refuge in Aurelia's arms. Or they might play in the stately garden, provided they trod on no borders, and meddled with neither flower nor fruit. The old gardener began by viewing them as his natural enemies, but soon relaxed in amusement at their pretty sportive ways, gave them many precious spoils, and forgave more than one naughty little inroad, which greatly alarmed their guardian.

Or if the little party felt enterprising, there lay beyond, the park, its slopes covered with wild strawberries, and with woods where they could gather flowers unchecked. Further, there was no going, except on alternate Sundays, when there was service in the tumble-down Church at the park gate. It was in far worse condition than the Church at home, and was served by a poor forlorn-looking curate, who lived at Brentford, and divided his services between four parishes, each of which was content to put up with a fortnightly alternate morning and evening service.

The Belamour seat was a square one, without the comfortable appliances of the Delavie closet, and thus permitting a much fuller view, but there was nothing to be seen except a row of extremely gaudy Belamour hatchments, displaying to the full, the saltir-wise sheafs of arrows on the shields or lozenges, supported by grinning skulls. The men's shields preserved their eagle crest, the women had only lozenges, and the family motto, *Amo et Amabo*, was exchanged for the more pious "*Resurgam*."

Aurelia found that the family seat, whither she was marshalled by Mrs. Aylward, was already occupied by two ladies, who rose up, and made her stately curtsies with a decidedly disgusted air, although there was ample space for her and little Fidelia, the only one of her charges whom she had ventured to take with her. They wore the black hoods, laced boddices, long rolls of towering curl and open upper skirts, of Queen Anne's day, and in the eyes of thirty years' later, looked so ridiculous that Fay could not but stare at them the whole time, and whenever Aurelia turned her

glances from her book to see whether her little companion was behaving herself, the big blue considering eyes were always levelled full upon the two forms before her.

The ladies were in keeping with their dress, thin, stiff, and angular, with worn and lined faces, highly rouged, and enormous long-handled fans, and Aurelia was almost as much astonished as the child.

There was a low curtseying again, and much ceremony before it was possible to get out of the pew, and the two ladies mounted at the door on lofty pattens which added considerably to their height, and, attended by a loutish-looking man in livery, who carried their books, stalked off into the village.

Aurelia found from the communicative Molly that they were Mistress Phoebe and Mistress Delia Treforth, kinswomen of the Belamour family, who had in consequence a life residence rent-free in a tall thin red square house near the churchyard, where a very gay parrot was always to be seen in the windows. They no doubt regarded Miss

Delavie and the little Waylands as interlopers at Bowstead, and their withering glances made Church-going a trying affair—indeed the first time that Aurelia took little Amoret, they actually drove the sensitive child into a sobbing fit, so that she had to be carried out, begging to know why those ladies looked so cross at her.

The life, on the whole, was not unhappy, except for fits of homesickness and longing for letters. The arrival of the boxes from the carrier was the first comfort, and then at last came a thick letter from home, franked by Sir George Herries, and containing letters from everybody—even a few roundhand lines from Eugene.

Her father wrote at length all the excellent moral and religious essay which had stuck in his throat at the parting ; neither was Betty's letter deficient in good advice, though she let it appear that the family were much amused at Lady Belamour's affliction in her triad of daughters, the secret having been hitherto so carefully kept that they supposed her to have only one.

“It will be your Charge,” wrote Betty, “so far

as in you lies, to render them not merely the Graces, as my Father terms them, but the true Christian Graces, whose Names they bear. You are very young, my dear Sister, but I have full Confidence in your Endeavour to be a true and faithful Guardian to these Infant Spirits. Though their Mother has shown no Care or heed in entrusting them to you, yet remember that it is truly the good Providence of their Heavenly Father that has put these little Children of His in your Charge, to receive from you the first Principles of Religion and Morals which may mould their whole Lives; and I trust that you will do the Work faithfully and successfully. It may be dull and tedious at Bowstead, but I had much rather hear of you thus than exposed to the full Glare of my Lady's Saloon in London. No doubt Harriet has writ to you of the Visit of young Sir Amyas, the Sunday after your Departure. We have since heard that his expedition to Monmouthshire was with a View to his marriage with Lady Aresfield's Daughter, and this may well be, so that if he fall in your way, you will be warned against putting any misconstruc-

tion on any Civil Attentions he may pay to you. Ever since your Departure Mr. Arden has redoubled his Assiduities in a certain Quarter, and as it is thought the Dean and Chapter are not unlikely to present him to a good Vicarage in Buckinghamshire, it is not unlikely that ere long you may hear of a Wedding in the Family, although Harriet would be extremely angry with me for daring to give such a Hint."

Certainly Aurelia would not have gathered the hint from Harriet's letter, which was very sentimental about her own loneliness and lack of opportunity, in contrast with Aurelia who was seeing the world. That elegant beau, Sir Amyas, had just given a sample to tantalise their rusticity, and then had vanished ; and here was that oddity, Mr. Arden, more wearisome and pertinacious than ever. So tiresome !

CHAPTER X.

THE DARK CHAMBER.

Or singst thou rather under force
Of some Divine command,
Commissioned to presage a course
Of happier days at hand?

COWPER.

AURELIA was coming down stairs in the twilight after singing her charges to sleep about three weeks after her arrival, when she saw Jumbo waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

She had long ceased to be afraid of him. Indeed he had quite amazed her by his good-nature in helping to lift down naughty little Letitia, who was clambering up to the window of his master's chamber to look through the crevices of the shutters. He had given the children a gaily dressed rag doll, and was as delighted as they

were when he played his fiddle to them and set them dancing.

Still, the whites of his eyes, his shining teeth, and the gold lace of his livery had a startling effect in the darkness, and Aurelia wished he would move away; but he was evidently waiting for her, and when she came near he addressed her thus, "Mis'r Belamour present compliment, and would Miss Delavie be good enough to honour him with her company for a short visit?"

The girl started, dismayed, alarmed, yet unwilling to be unkind to the poor recluse, while she hoped that decorum and propriety would put the visit out of the question. She replied that she would ask Mrs. Aylward whether she might, and Jumbo followed her to the still-room, saying on the way, "Mas'r heard Miss Delavie sing. He always has the window opened to hear her. It makes him hum the air—be merry. He has not asked to speak with lady since he heard the bad news—long, long ago."

Then Aurelia felt that nothing short of absolute impropriety ought to make her gratify her

shrinking reluctance. Mrs. Aylward seemed to think her doubts uncalled for, and attributed her hesitation to fear of the dark room.

“Oh, no, I am not so childish,” said the young lady with nervous dignity; “but would it be proper?”

“Bless me, madam, he is as old as your father, and as civil a gentleman as lives. I would come in with you but that I am expecting Mr. Potts with the tallies. You need have no scruples.”

There was no excuse nor escape, and Aurelia followed the negro in trepidation. Crossing the hall, he opened for her the door of the lobby corresponding to her own, and saying, “Allow me, ma’am,” passed before her, and she heard another door unclosed, and a curtain withdrawn. Beyond she only saw a gulf of darkness, but out of it came a deep manly voice, subdued and melancholy, but gentlemanlike and deferential.

“The young lady is so kind as to come and cheer the old hermit. A thousand thanks, madam. Permit me.”

Aurelia’s hand was taken by one soft for want

of use, and she was led forward on a deep piled carpet, and carefully placed on a chair in the midst of the intense black darkness. There was a little movement and then the voice said, "I am most sensible of your goodness, madam."

"I—I am glad. You are very good, sir," murmured Aurelia, oppressed by the gloom and the peculiar atmosphere, cool—for the windows were open behind the shutters—but strangely fragrant.

"How does my excellent friend, Major Delavie?"

"I thank you, sir, he is well, though his wound troubles him from time to time."

"Commend me to him when you write, if you are good enough to remember it."

"I thank you, sir. He will be rejoiced to hear of you."

"He does me too much honour."

These conventionalities being exhausted, a formidable pause ensued, first broken by Mr. Belamour, "May I ask how my fair visitor likes Bowstead?"

"It is a fine place, sir."

“But somewhat lonely for so youthful a lady?”

“I have the children, sir.”

“I often hear their cheerful voices.”

“I hope we do not disturb you, sir, I strive to restrain them, but I fear we are all thoughtless.”

“Nay, the innocent sounds of mirth ring sweetly on my ears, like the notes of birds. And when I have heard a charming voice singing to the little ones, I have listened with delight. Would it be too presumptuous to beg the fair songstress to repeat her song for the old recluse?”

“O sir, I have only nursery ditties, caught from our old German maid,” cried Aurelia, in dismay.

“That might not diminish the charm to me,” he said. “In especial there was one song whose notes Jumbo caught as you accompanied yourself on the spinnet.”

And Jumbo, who seemed able to see in the dark, played a bar on his violin, while Aurelia trembled with shyness.

“The Nightingale Song,” she said. “My dear mother learnt the tune abroad. And I believe

that she herself made the English words, when she was asked what the nightingales say."

"May I hear it? Nightingales can sing in the dark." Refusal was impossible, and Jumbo's violin was a far more effective accompaniment than her own very moderate performance on the spinnet; so in a sweet, soft, pure, untrained and trembling voice, she sang—

"O Life and Light are sweet, my dear,
O Life and Light are sweet;
But sweeter still the hope and cheer
When Love and Life shall meet.
Oh! then it is most sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet.

"But Love puts on the yoke, my dear,
But Love puts on the yoke;
The dart of Love calls forth the tear,
As though the heart were broke.
The very heart were broke, broke, broke, broke, broke, broke.

"And Love can quench Life's Light, my dear,
Drear, dark, and melancholy;
Seek Light and Life and jocund cheer,
And mirth and pleasing folly.
Be thine, light-hearted folly, folly, folly, folly, folly, folly.

"'Nay, nay,' she sang, 'yoke, pain, and tear,
For Love I gladly greet;
Light, Life, and Mirth are nothing here,
Without Love's bitter sweet.
Give me Love's bitter sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet.'"

“Accept my fervent thanks, kind songstress. So that is the nightingale’s song, and your honoured mother’s?”

“Yes, sir. My father often makes us sing it because it reminds him of her.”

“Philomel could not have found a better interpreter,” said the grave voice, sounding so sad that Aurelia wished she could have sung something less affecting to his spirits.

“I gather from what you said that you are no longer blessed with the presence of that excellent lady, your mother,” presently added Mr. Belamour.

“No, sir. We lost her seven years ago.”

“And her husband mourns her still. Well he may. She was a rare creature. So she is gone! I have been so long in seclusion that no doubt time has made no small havoc, and my friends have had many griefs to bewail.”

Aurelia knew not what answer to make, and was relieved when he collected himself and said:—

“I will trespass no longer on my fair visitor’s complaisance, but if she have not found the gloom of this apartment insupportable, it would be a

charitable action to brighten it once more with her presence."

"O sir, I will come whenever you are pleased to send for me," she exclaimed, all her doubts, fears, and scruples vanishing at his tone of entreaty. "My father would be so glad. I will practise my best song to sing to you to-morrow."

"My best thanks are yours," and her hand was again taken; she was carefully conducted to the door and dismissed with a gentle pressure of her fingers, and a courteous: "Good-night, madam; *Au revoir*, if I may venture to say so."

By contrast, the hall looked almost light, and Aurelia could see the skip of joy with which Jumbo hurried to fetch a candle. As he gave it to her, he made his teeth flash from ear to ear, as he exclaimed: "Pretty missy bring new life to mas'r!"

Thus did a new element come into Aurelia's life. She carefully prepared Harriet's favourite song, a French *romance*, but Mr. Belamour did not like it equally well with the Nightingale, which he made her repeat, rewarding her by telling her of

the charming looks and manners of her mother, so that she positively enjoyed her visit. The next night he made inquiries into her walks at Bowstead, asking after the favourite nooks of his childhood, and directing her to the glades where grew the largest dewberries and sweetest blackberries. This led to her recital of a portion of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, for he drew her on with thanks at every pause: "I have enjoyed no such treat for many years," he said.

"There are other pieces that I can recite another time," said Aurelia timidly.

"You will confer a great favour on me," he answered.

So she refreshed her memory by a mental review of *Paradise Lost* over her embroidery frame, and was ready with Adam's morning hymn, which was much relished. Compliments on her elocution soon were turned by her into the praise of "sister," and as she became more at ease, the strange man in the dark listened with evident delight to her pretty fresh prattle about sisters and brother, and father and home. Thus it had

become a daily custom that she should spend the time between half past seven and nine in the company of the prisoner of darkness, and she was beginning to look forward to it as the event of the day. She scarcely expected to be sent for on Sunday evening, but Jumbo came as usual with the invitation, and she was far from sorry to quit a worm-eaten Baxter's *Saints' Rest* which she had dutifully borrowed from Mrs. Aylward.

"Well, my fair visitor," said the voice which had acquired a tone of pleased anticipation, "what mental repast has your goodness provided?"

"It is Sunday, sir."

"Ah!" as if it had not occurred to him, and with some disappointment.

"I could say the Psalms by heart, sir, if you would like it, for it is the 20th day of the month."

"Thank you. Your voice can make anything sweet."

Aurelia was shocked, and knew that Betty would be more so, but she was too shy to do anything except to begin: "Praise thou the Lord, O my soul."

It was a fortunate thing that it was a Psalm of such evident beauty, for it fell less familiarly on his ear than her passages from the poets. At the end he said: "Yes, that is true poetry. Praise fits well with happy young lips. You have been to church?"

"No, sir, Mr. Greaves does not come to-day."

"Then how did the gentle saint perform her orisons?"

"Please do not so call me, sir! I tried to read the service, but I could not get the children to be still, so I had to tell them about Joseph, and I found a beautiful Bible full of pictures, like our Dutch one at home."

"You found the old Bible? My mother used to show it to my brother and me—my poor mother!"

He mentioned one or two of the engravings, which he had never forgotten, but the evening was less of a success than usual, and Aurelia doubted whether he would wish for her that day se'nnight. All her dread of him was gone; she knew she had brought a ray of brightness into his

solitary broken life, and her mind was much occupied with the means of affording him pleasure. Indeed she might have wearied of the lack of all companionship save that of the young children; and converse with a clever highly cultivated mind was stimulating and expanding all her faculties. When the stores of her memory were becoming exhausted, Jumbo was bidden to open a great case of books which had lain untouched since they were sent down from Mr. Belamour's chambers at the Temple, and they were placed at her disposal. Here was Mr. Alexander Pope's translation of the *Iliad* of Homer, which had appeared shortly before the fatal duel, and Aurelia eagerly learnt whole pages of it by heart for the evening's amusement, enjoying extremely the elucidations and criticisms of her auditor, who would dwell on a passage all day, beg to have it repeated a second time in the evening, and then tell her what his memory or his reflection had suggested about it. Moreover, having heard some inexplicable report, through Jumbo, of the Porteous mob, Mr. Belamour became curious to learn the truth, and

this led to his causing the newspapers to be sent weekly to be read and reported to him by Aurelia. It seemed incredible that a man of so much ability should have been content to spend all these years in the negro's sole society, but no doubt the injury done to the brain had been aggravated by grief and remorse, so that he had long lain, with suspended faculties, in a species of living death; whence he had only gradually, and as it were unconsciously, advanced to his present condition. Perhaps Mr. Wayland's endeavours to rouse him had come too soon, or in a less simple and attractive form, for they had been reluctantly received and had proved entirely unsuccessful; while the child-like efforts of the girl, following his lead instead of leading him, were certainly awakening him, and renewing his spirits and interest in the world at large in an unlooked-for manner.

CHAPTER XI.

A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE.

He hath a word for thee to speak.

KEBLE.

NO difference was made as to Aurelia's visits to Mr. Belamour on Sunday evenings, but he respected her scruples against indulgence in profane literature, and encouraged her to repeat passages of Scripture, beginning to taste the beauty of the grand cadences falling from her soft measured voice. Thus had she come to the Sermon on the Mount, and found herself repeating the expansion of the Sixth Commandment ending with, "And thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt not come out thence until thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

A groan startled her. Then came silence, and

she recollected the import of the passage and the unhappy man's history with a sudden stab. A horror of the darkness fell on her. She felt as if he were in the prison and she reproaching him, and cried out—"O sir, forgive me. I forgot ; I did not say it on purpose."

"No, my child, it was Mary speaking by your voice. No, Mary, I shall never come out. It will never be paid."

She shook with fright as Jumbo touched her, saying, "Misee, go ; mas'r bear no more ;" but, as she rose to go away, a sweet impulse made her pause and say, "It is paid. *He* paid. You know Who did—in His own Blood."

Jumbo drew her away almost by force, and when outside, exclaimed, "Misee never speak of blood or kill to mas'r—he not bear it. Head turn again—see shapes as bad as ever."

The poor child cried bitterly, calling herself cruel, thoughtless, presumptuous ; and for the next few days Jumbo's eyes glared at her as he reported his master to be very ill ; but, on the third day, he came for her as usual. She thought

Mr. Belamour's tones unwontedly low and depressed, but no reference was made to the Sunday, and she was glad enough to plunge into the council of Olympus.

A day or two later, Dame Wheatfield sent her husband with an urgent invitation to Miss Amoret with her sisters and cousin to be present at her harvest home. Mrs. Aylward, with a certain tone of contempt, gave her sanction to their going with Molly, by the help of the little pony cart used about the gardens. Aurelia, in high glee, told Mr. Belamour, who encouraged her to describe all her small adventures, and was her oracle in all the difficult questions that Fidelia's childish wisdom was wont to start.

"To Wheatfield's farm, did you say? That is in Sedhurst. There are but three fields between it and the Church."

Presently he added: "I am tempted to ask a great kindness, though I know not whether it will be possible to you."

"Indeed, sir I will do my utmost."

"There are two graves in Sedhurst Church, I

have never dared to inquire about them. Would it be asking too much from my gentle friend to beg of her to visit them, and let me hear of them."

"I will, I will, sir, with all my heart."

By eight o'clock the next evening she was again with him, apologising for being late.

"I scarcely expected this pleasure to-night. These rural festivities are often protracted."

"O sir, I was heartily glad to escape and to get the children away. The people were becoming so rude and riotous that I was frightened. I never would have gone, had I known what it would be like, but at home the people are fond of asking us to their harvest feasts, and they always behave well whilst we are there."

"No doubt they hold your father in respect."

"Yes," said Aurelia, unwilling to tell him how much alarmed and offended she had been, though quite unintentionally. Dame Wheatfield only intended hospitality; but in her eyes "Miss" was merely a poor governess, and that to the little Waylands—mere interlopers in the eyes of the

Belamour tenantry. So the good woman had no idea that the rough gallantry of the young farmer guests was inappropriate, viewing it as the natural tribute to her guest's beauty, and mistaking genuine offence for mere coyness, until, finding it was real earnest, considerable affront was taken at "young madam's fine airs, and she only a poor kinswoman of my Lady's!" Quite as ill was it received that the young lady had remonstrated against the indigestible cakes and strange beverages administered to all her charges, and above all to Amoret. She had made her escape on the plea of early hours for the children, leaving Molly behind her, just as the boisterous song was beginning in which Jack kisses Bet, Joe kisses Sue, Tom kisses Nan, &c. down to poor Dorothy Draggletail, who is left in the lurch. The farewell had been huffy. "A good evening to you, madam; I am sorry our entertainment was not more to your taste." She had felt guilty and miserable at the accusation of pride, and she could not imagine how Mrs. Aylward could have let her go without a warning; the truth being that Mrs. Aylward despised her taste,

but thought she knew what a harvest supper was like.

All this was passed over in silence by Aurelia's pride and delicacy. She only described the scene when the last waggon came in with its load, the horses decked with flowers and ribbons, and the farmer's youngest girl enthroned on the top of the shocks, upholding the harvest doll. This was a little sheaf, curiously constructed and bound with straw plaits and ribbons. The farmer, on the arrival in the yard, stood on the horse-block, and held it high over the heads of all the harvesters, and the chorus was raised :

“A knack, a knack, a knack,
Well cut, well bound,
Well shocked, well saved from the ground,
Well scattered on the ground,
Whoop ! whoop ! whoop !”

After which the harvest doll displaced her last year's predecessor over the hearth, where she was to hang till next year.

All this Aurelia described, comparing the customs with those of her own county, her heart

beating all the time under the doubt how to venture on describing the fulfilment of her commission.

At last Mr. Belamour said,

“In such a scene of gaiety, no doubt the recollection of sorrow had no place.”

“O sir, you could not think I should forget.”

“I thought I might have asked more than was possible to you.”

“It was the only part of the day that I enjoyed. I took little Fay with me, for no one seemed to care for her, while Amy was queening it with all the Wheatfields, and Letty was equally happy with her foster mother. I could see the church spire, so I needed not to ask the way, and we crossed the stubble fields, while the sun sent a beautiful slanting light through the tall elm trees that closed in the churchyard, but let one window glitter between them like a great diamond. It looked so peaceful after all the noise we left behind, even little Fay felt it, and said she loved the quiet walk along the green baulks. The churchyard has a wooden rail with steps to cross it on either side,

and close under the church wall is a tomb, a great square simple block, surmounted by an urn."

"Yes, let me hear," said the voice, eager, though stifled.

"I thought it might be what you wished me to see and went up to read the names."

"Do not spare. Never fear. Let me hear the very words."

"On one face of the block there was the name—

‘ WILLIAM SEDHURST,

AGED 27,

DIED MAY 13, 1729.’

On the other side was this inscription :—

‘ MARY,

ONLY DAUGHTER OF GEORGE SEDHURST, ESQUIRE,

AGED 19,

DIED AUGUST 1st, 1729.

Love is strong as Death.

Sorrow not as others that have no Hope.’

In smaller letters down below, ‘ This epitaph is at her own special request.’

"Sir," continued Aurelia, "it was very curious. I should not have observed those words if it had not been that a large beautiful butterfly, with rainbow eyes on its wings, sat sunning itself on the white marble, and Fay called me to look at it."

"Her message! May I ask you to repeat it again?"

"The texts? 'Love is strong as death.' 'Sorrow not as others that have no hope.'"

"Did you call them Scripture texts?"

"Yes, sir; I know the last is in one of the Epistles, and I will look for the other."

"It matters not. She intended them for a message to me who lay in utter darkness and imbecility well befitting her destroyer."

"Nay, they have come to you at last," said Aurelia gently. "You really never knew of them before?"

"No, I durst not ask, nor did any one dare to speak to me. My brother, who alone would have done so, died, I scarcely know when; but ere the very consciousness of my own wretched existence

had come back to me. Once again repeat the words, gentle messenger of mercy."

She obeyed, but this time he mournfully murmured, "Hope! What hope for their destroyer?"

"They are God's words, as well as hers," the girl answered, with diffident earnestness, but in reply she only heard tightened breaths, which made her say, "You cannot bear more, sir. Let me call Jumbo, and bid you good night."

Jumbo came at the mention of his name. Somehow he was so unlike other human beings, and so wholly devoted to his master, that it never seemed to be a greater shock to find that he had been present than if he had been a faithful dog.

A few days later he told Aurelia that Mas'r was not well enough to see her. He had set forth as soon as the moon had set, and walked with his trusty servant to Sedhurst, where he had traced with his finger the whole inscription, lingering so long that the sun was above the horizon before he could get home; and he was still lying on the bed where he had thrown himself on first coming in, having neither spoken nor eaten since.

Jumbo could not but grumble out that Mas'r was better left to himself.

Yet when Aurelia on the third evening was recalled, there was a ring of refreshment in the voice. It was still melancholy, but the dejection was lessened, and though it was only of Achilles and Patroclus that they talked, she was convinced that the pressure of the heavy burthen of grief and remorse was in some degree lightened.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHAFTS OF PHŒBE.

Her golden bow she bends,
Her deadly arrows sending forth.
Greek Hymn (KEIGHTLEY).

ON coming in from a walk, Aurelia was surprised by the tidings that Mistress Phœbe Treforth had come to call on her, and had left a billet. The said billet was secured with floss silk sealed down in the antiquated fashion, and was written on full-sized quarto paper. These were the contents :—

“MADAM,

“My Sister and Myself are desirous of the Honour of your Acquaintance, and shall be happy

if you will do us the Pleasure of coming to partake of Dinner at Three o'Clock on Tuesday, the 13th instant.

“ I remain,

“ Yours to command,

“ DELIA TREFORTH.”

Aurelia carried the invitation to her oracle.

“ My cousins are willing to make your acquaintance ? ” said he. “ That is well. Jumbo shall escort you home in the evening.”

“ Thank you, sir, but must I accept the invitation ? ”

“ It could not be declined without incivility. Moreover, the Mistresses Treforth are highly respected, and your father and sister will certainly think it well for you to have female friends.”

“ Do you think those ladies could ever be my friends, sir ? ” she asked, with an intonation that made him reply, with a sound of amusement.

“ I am no judge in such matters, but they are ladies well connected and esteemed, who might befriend and counsel you in case of need, and at

any rate, it is much more suitable that you should be on terms of friendly intercourse with them. I am heartily glad they have shown you this attention."

"I did not mean to be ungrateful, sir."

"And I think you have disproved that

Crabbed age and youth
Cannot live together."

"If they were only like you, sir!"

"What would they say to that?" he said with the slight laugh that had begun to enliven his voice. "I suppose your charges are not included in the invitation?"

"No; but Molly can take care of them, if my Lady will not object to my leaving them."

"She cannot reasonably do so."

"And, sir, shall I be permitted to come home in time for you to receive me?"

"I fear I must forego that pleasure. The ladies will insist on cards and supper. Jumbo shall come for you at nine o'clock."

Aurelia submitted, and tripped down arrayed

in the dress that recalled the fête at Carminster, except that only a little powder was sprinkled on her temples. The little girls jumped round her in admiring ecstasy, and, under Molly's charge, escorted her to the garden gate, and hovered outside to see her admitted, while she knocked timidly at the door, in the bashful alarm of making her first independent visit.

The loutish man ushered her into a small close room, containing a cat, a little spaniel, a green parrot, a spinning-wheel, and an embroidery frame. There were also the two old ladies, dressed with old-fashioned richness, a little faded, and a third, in a crimson, gold-laced joseph, stout, rubicund, and hearty, to whom Aurelia was introduced thus—

“Mrs. Hunter, allow me to present to you Miss Delavie, a relative of my Lady Belamour. Miss Delavie, Mrs. Hunter of Brentford.”

“I am most happy to make your acquaintance, Miss,” said the lady, in a jovial voice, and Aurelia made her curtsy, but at that moment the man announced that dinner was served, whereupon

Mrs. Delia handed Mrs. Hunter in, and Mrs. Phoebe took the younger guest.

The ladies' faces both bore token of their recent attention to the preparation of the meal, and the curious dishes would have been highly interesting to Betty, but there was no large quantity of any, and a single chicken was the *pièce de résistance*, whence very tiny helps were dealt out, and there was much unnecessary pressing to take a little more, both of that and of the brace of partridges which succeeded it. As to conversation, there was room for none, except hospitable invitations from the hostesses to take the morsels that they cut for their guests, praises of the viands from Mrs. Hunter, and endeavours to fish at the recipes, which the owners guarded jealously as precious secrets. Aurelia sat perfectly silent, as was then reckoned as proper in a young lady of her age, except when addressed. A good deal of time was also expended in directing John Stiggins, the ladies' own man, and George Brown, who had ridden with Mrs. Hunter from Brentford, in the disposal of the dishes, and the handing of the plates. George Brown was the more

skilled waiter, and as the man who was at home did not brook interference, their disputes were rude and audible, and kept the ladies in agonies lest they should result in ruin to the best china.

At last, however, the cloth was removed, walnuts, apples, pears, and biscuits were placed on the table, a glass of wine poured out for each lady, and the quartette, with the cat and dog, drew near the sunny window, where there was a little warmth. It was a chilly day, but no one ever lighted a fire before the 5th of November, Old Style.

Then began one of those catechisms which fortunately are less unpleasant to youth and simplicity than they are to persons of an age to resent inquiry, and who have more resources of conversation. In truth, Aurelia was in the eyes of the Treforth sisters, descendants of a former Sir Jovian, only my Lady's poor kinswoman sent down to act *gouvernante* to the Wayland brats, who had been impertinently quartered in the Belamour household. She would have received no further notice, had it not been reported through the servants that "young Miss" spent the evenings

with their own cousin, from whom they had been excluded ever since his illness.

The subject was approached through interrogations on Miss Delavie's home and breeding, how she had travelled, and what were her accomplishments, also whether she were quite sure that none of the triad was either imbecile nor deformed. Mrs. Hunter seemed to have heard wonderful rumours about the poor children.

"Has their lady mother seen them?"

"Yes, madam. She had been there with them shortly before my arrival."

"Only once in their lives!" There was a groan of censure such as would have fired the loyal Major in defence.

"No wonder, Sister Phœbe, my Lady Belamour does not lead the life of a tender mother."

"She has the little boy, Archer, with her in London," Aurelia ventured to say.

"And a perfect puppet she makes of the poor child," said Mrs. Hunter. "My sister Chetwynd saw him with his mother at a masquerade, my Lady Belamour flaunting as Venus, and he, when

he ought to have been in his bed, dressed in rose-colour and silver, with a bow and arrows, and gauze wings on his shoulders!"

"What will that child come to?"

"Remember, Sister Delia, he is no kin of ours. He is only a Wayland!" returned Mrs. Phœbe, in an accent as if the Waylands were the most contemptible of vermin.

"I hope," added Mrs. Delia, "that these children are never premitted to incommode our unfortunate cousin, Mr. Belamour."

"I trust not, madam," said Aurelia. "Their rooms are at a distance from his; they are good children, and he says he likes to hear young voices in the gardens."

"You have, then, seen Mr. Belamour?"

"I cannot say that I have seen him," said Aurelia, modestly; "but I have conversed with him."

"Indeed! Alone with him?"

"Jumbo was there."

The two old ladies drew themselves up, while Mrs. Hunter chuckled and giggled. "Indeed!" said Mrs. Phœbe; "we should never see a

gentleman in private without each other's company, or that of some female companion."

"I consulted Mrs. Aylward," returned Aurelia, "and she said he was old enough to be my father."

"Mrs. Aylward may be a respectable house-keeper, though far too lavish of butcher's meat, but I should never have recourse to her on a matter of decorum," said Mrs. Phœbe.

Aurelia's cheeks burnt, but she still defended herself. "I have heard from my father and my sister," she said, "and they make no objection."

"Hoity-toity! What means this heat, miss?" exclaimed Mrs. Phœbe; "I am only telling you, as a kindness, what we should have thought becoming with regard even to a blood relation of our own."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Aurelia; "but, you see, you are so much nearer his age, that the cases are not alike."

She said it in all simplicity, and did not perceive, at first, why the two sisters drew themselves up in so much offence, or why Mrs. Hunter looked

so much amused, and cried, "Oh, fie, for shame, you saucy chit! Bless me!" she continued, more good-naturedly, "Cousin Phœbe, times are changed since we were young, and poor Sir Jovian and his brother were the county beaux. The child is right enough when one comes to think of it; and for my part, I should be glad that poor Mr. Amyas had some one young and cheerful about him. It is only a pity his nephew, the young baronet, never comes down to see him."

"Like mother like son," said Mrs. Phœbe; "I grieve to think what the old place will come to."

"Well," said Mrs. Hunter, "I do not hear the young gentleman ill spoken of; though, more's the pity, he is in a bad school with Colonel Mar for his commanding officer, the fine gallant who is making his mother the talk of the town!"

The gossip and scandal then waxed fast and furious on the authority of Mrs. Hunter's sister, but no one paid any more attention to Aurelia, except that when there was an adjournment to the next room, she was treated with such double stiffness and ceremony as to make her feel that

she had given great offence, and was highly disapproved of by all but Mrs. Hunter. And Aurelia could not like her, for her gossip had been far broader and coarser than that of the Mistresses Treforth, who, though more bitter, were more of gentlewomen. Happily much of what passed was perfectly unintelligible to Betty's carefully shielded pupil, who sat all the time with the cat on her lap, listening to its purring music, but feeling much more inclined to believe nothing against my Lady, after her father's example, than to agree with those who were so evidently prejudiced. Tea was brought in delicate porcelain cups, then followed cards, which made the time pass less drearily till supper. This consisted of dishes still tinier than those at dinner, and it was scarcely ended when it was announced that Jumbo had come for Miss Delavie.

Gladly she departed, after an exchange of curtsies, happily not hearing the words behind her :—

“ An artful young minx.”

“ And imagine the impudence of securing Jumbo's attendance, forsooth !”

“Nay,” said Mrs. Hunter, “she seemed to me a pretty modest young gentlewoman enough.”

“Pretty! Yes, she comes of my Lady’s own stock, and will be just such another.”

“Yes; it is quite plain that it is true that my Lady sent her here because she had been spreading the white apron for the young baronet.”

“And now she is trying her arts on poor cousin Amyas Belamour. You heard how she would take no advice, and replied with impertinence.”

“Shall you give my Lady a hint?”

“Not I. I have been treated with too much insolence by Lady Belamour to interfere with her again,” said Mrs. Phœbe, drawing herself up; “I shall let things take their course unless I can remonstrate with my own kinsman.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLUTTER OF HIS WINGS.

Then is Love's hour to stray !
Oh, how he flies away !—T. MOORE.

MEANWHILE Aurelia, mounted on a pair of pattens brought by the negro to keep her above the dew, was crossing the park by the light of a fine hunter's moon, Jumbo marching at a respectful distance in the rear. He kept on chuckling to himself with glee, and when she looked round at him, he informed her with great exultation that "Mas'r had not been alone. His honour had been to see him. Mas'r so glad."

"Sir Amyas !" exclaimed Aurelia : "Is he there still ?"

"No, missie. He went away before supper."

"Did he see the young ladies ?"

“Oh, yes, missie. He came before mas'r up, quite promiskius,” said Jumbo, who loved a long word. “I tell him, wait till mas'r be dress, and took him to summer parlour. He see little missies out in garden; ask what chil'ren it was. His Honour's sisters, Missie Fay, Missie Letty, Missie Amy, I say! His Honour wonder. ‘My sisters,’ he say, ‘my sisters here,’ and out he goes like flash of lightning and was in among them.”

Aurelia's first thought was “Oh, I hope they were clean and neat, and that they behaved themselves. I wish I had been at home.” Wherewith followed the recollection that Sir Amyas had been called her beau, and her cheeks burnt; but the recent disagreeable lecture on etiquette showed her that it would only have led to embarrassment and vexation to have had any question of an interview with a young gentleman by so little her elder. Nor would she have known what to say to him. Old Mr. Belamour in the dark was a very different matter, and she had probably had an escape from much awkwardness.

Molly received her with her favourite exclama-

tion: "Lawk, miss, and who do you think have been here?"

"Jumbo told me, Molly."

"Ain't he a perfect pictur of a man? And such a gentleman! He gave me a whole goolden guinea for my good care of his little sisters, and says he: 'Their father shall hear of them, and what little ladies they be.'"

"I am glad they behaved themselves prettily."

"Yes, that they did, ma'am. It was good luck that they had not been grubbing in their gardens, as you lets 'em do, ma'am, but they was all as clean as a whistle, a picking up horse-chestnuts under the big tree at the corner of the bowling green, when out on the steps we sees him, looking more like an angel than a man, in his red coat, and the goold things on his shoulders, and out he comes! Miss Amy, she was afeard at first: 'Be the soldiers a coming?' says she, and runs to me; but Miss Letty, she holds out her arms, and says, 'It's my papa,' and Miss Fay, she stood looking without a word. Then when his Honour was in among them: 'My little sisters, my dear little

sisters,' says he, 'don't you know me?' and down he goes on one knee in the grass, never heeding his beautiful white small-clothes, if you'll believe me, miss, and holds out his arms, and gets Miss Fay into one arm, and Miss Letty into t'other, and then Miss Amy runs up, and he kisses them all. Then Miss Letty says again 'Are you my papa from foreign parts?' and he laughs and says: 'No, little one, I'm your brother. Did you never hear of your brother Amyas?' and Miss Fay stood off a little and clapped her little hands, and says: 'O brother Amyas, how beautiful you are!'"

Aurelia could not help longing to know whether she had been mentioned, but she did not like to inquire, and she was obliged to rest satisfied with the assurance that her little girls had comported themselves like jewels, like lambs, like darling lumps of sugar, or whatever metaphors were suggested by the imagination of Molly, who had, apparently, usurped the entire credit of their good manners. It was impossible to help feeling a little aggrieved, or, maugre all inconvenient

proprieties, to avoid wishing to have been under the horse-chestnut tree, even though she might have shown herself just such a bashful little speechless fool as she had been when Sir Amyas had danced with her at Carminster.

She was destined to hear a good deal more of the visitor the next day. The children met her with the cry of "Cousin Aura, our brother"—"Our big beautiful brother—Brother Amyas."—They were with difficulty calmed into saying their prayers, and Amoret startled the little congregation by adding to "bless my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters," "and pray bless big brother Amyas best of all, for I love him very much indeed!"

All day little facts about "brother Amyas" kept breaking out. Brother Amyas had beautiful gold lace, brother Amyas had a red and white feather; brother Amyas had given Fay and Letty each a ride on his shoulder, but Amy was afraid; brother Amyas said their papa would love them very much. He had given them each a new silver shilling, and Amoret had in return presented him

with her doll's beautiful pink back-string that Cousin Aura had made for her. This wonderful brother had asked who had taught them to be such pretty little gentlewomen, and at this Aurelia's heart beat a little, but provoking Fidelia replied: "I told him my Mammy Rolfe taught me to be genteel," and Letty added: "And he said Fay was a conceited little pussy cat."

A strange indefinable feeling between self-respect and shyness made Aurelia shrink from the point-blank question whether the ungrateful little things had acknowledged their obligations to her. She was always hoping they would say something of their own accord, and always disappointed.

Evening came, and she eagerly repaired to the dark room, wondering, yet half dreading to enter on the subject, and beginning by an apology for having by no means perfected herself in Priam's visit to Achilles.

"If you have been making visits," said Mr. Belamour: "I too have had a visitor."

"The children told me so," she answered.

"He was greatly delighted with them," said Mr. Belamour.

"While they, poor little things, never were more happy in their lives. He must have been very kind to them, yet he did not know that they were here."

"His mother is not communicative respecting them. Ladies who love power seek to preserve it by making little mysteries."

"It was to see you, sir, that he came."

"Yes. He ingenuously avowed that he had always been urged to do so by his stepfather, but his mother has always put obstacles in the way, and assured him that he would not gain admission. I have certainly refused to see her, but this is a very different matter—my brother's only child, my godson, and my ward!"

"I am very glad he has come to see you, sir, and I am sure it has given you pleasure."

"Pleasure in seeing that he is a lad of parts, and of an ingenuous, affectionate, honest nature, but regret in perceiving how I have failed in the confidence that his father reposed in me."

"But, sir, you could not help it!"

"Once I could not. It was, I know not how long, before I knew that my brother was no more; and thinking myself dead to the world and the world to me, I took no heed to what, it now seems to me, I was told of guardianship to the boy. I was incapable of fulfilling any such charge, and I shunned the pain of hearing of it," he continued, rather as if talking to himself than to his auditor. "When I could, I gave them my name, and they asked no more. Yet what did they tell me of a sealed letter from my brother, addressed to me? True, I heard of it more than once, but I could ask no one to read it to me, and I closed my ears. In Wayland's hands I knew the youth was well cared for, and only now do I feel that I have ill requited my brother's confidence."

"Indeed, sir, I cannot see how you could have done otherwise," said Aurelia, who could not bear to hear his tone of self-reproach.

"My amiable visitor!" he exclaimed, as though recalled to a sense of her presence. "Excuse the absence of mind which has inflicted on you the

selfish murmurs of the old recluse. Tell me how you prospered with my cousins, whom I remember as sprightly maidens. Phœbe had somewhat of the prude, Delia of the coquette."

"I could imagine what you say of Mistress Phœbe, sir, better than of Mistress Delia."

"Had they any guests to meet you?"

"A Mrs. Hunter, sir, from Brentford, a doctor's wife, I suppose."

"You are right. She was a cousin of theirs on the other side of the house, a loud-voiced buxom lass, who was thought to have married beneath her when she took Dr. Hunter; but apparently they have forgiven her."

Mr. Belamour was evidently much interested and amused by Aurelia's small experiences and observations, such as they were. In spite of the sense of past omission which had been aroused by his nephew's visit, it had evidently raised his spirits, for he laughed when Aurelia spiced her descriptions with a little playful archness, and his voice became more cheery.

So, too, it was on the ensuing evening when

Aurelia, to compensate for the last day's neglect, came primed with three or four pages of the conversation between Priam and Achilles, which she rehearsed with great feeling, thinking, like Pelides himself, of her own father and home. It was requited with a murmured "Bravo," and Mr. Belamour then begged of her, if she were not weary, to favour him with the Nightingale Song, Jumbo as usual accompanying her with his violin. At the close there was again a "Bravo! Truly exquisite!" in a tone as if the hermit were really finding youth and life again. Once more at his request, she sang, and was applauded with even more fervour, with a certain tremulous eagerness in the voice. Yet there was probably a dread of the excitement being too much, for this was followed by "Thank you, kind songstress, I could listen for ever, but it is becoming late, and I must not detain you longer."

She found herself handed out of the room, with somewhat curtailed good nights, although nine o'clock, her usual signal, had not yet struck. When she came into the lamplit hall, Jumbo was

grinning and nodding like a maniac, and when she asked what was the matter, he only rolled his eyes, and said, "Missie good! Mas'r like music!"

The repressed excitability she had detected made her vaguely nervous (not that she would have so called herself), and as the next day was the blank Sunday, she appeased and worked off her restlessness by walking with the children to Sedhurst church. It was the sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, and the preacher, who had caught somewhat of the fire of Wesley and Whitfield, preached a sermon which arrested her attention, and filled her with new thoughts. Taking the Epistle and Gospel in connection, he showed the death-in-life of indifference, and the quickening touch of the Divine Love, awakening the dead spirit into true life. On that life, with its glow of love, hope, and joy, the preacher dwelt with enthusiasm such as Aurelia had never heard, and which carried her quite out of herself. Tears of emotion trembled in her eyes, and she felt a longing desire to walk on in that path of love to her Maker, whom she seemed to have never known before.

She talked with a new fervour to the children of the birds and flowers, and all the fair things they loved, as the gifts of their Father in Heaven ; and when she gathered them round the large pictured Bible, it was to the Gospel that she turned as she strove to draw their souls to the appreciation of the Redeeming Love there shown. She saw in Fay's deep eyes and thoughtful brow that the child was taking it in, though differently from Amy, who wanted to kiss the picture, while Letty asked those babyish material questions about Heaven that puzzle wiser heads than Aurelia's to answer.

So full was she of the thought, that she forgot her sense of something strange and unaccountable in Mr. Belamour's manner before the evening, nor was there anything to remind her of it afresh, for he was as calmly grave and kindly courteous as ever ; and he soon led her to pour forth all her impressions of the day. Indeed she repeated to him great part of the sermon, with a voice quivering with earnestness and emotion. He was not stirred in the same way as she had been,

saying in his pensive meditative way, "The preacher is right. Love is life. The misfortune is when we stake our all on one love alone, and that melts from us. Then indeed there is death—living death!"

"But there is never-failing love, and new life that never dies!" cried Aurelia, almost transported out of herself.

"May you ever keep hold of both unobscured, my sweet child," he returned, with a sadness that repressed and drove her back into herself again, feeling far too childish and unworthy to help him to that new life and love; though her young heart yearned over him in his desolation, and her soul was full of supplication for him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CANON OF WINDSOR.

Turn, gentle hermit of the dale.—GOLDSMITH.

“MY child, will you do me a favour?” said Mr. Belamour the next evening, in a tone no longer formal, but paternal. “Take this packet” (he put one into the girl’s hand) “to the light, and inform me what is the superscription.”

It was a thick letter, with a large red wax seal, bearing the well known arms of Belamour and Delavie, and the address was

To AMYAS BELAMOUR, ESQ., K.C.,

OF THE INNER TEMPLE, LONDON.

To be opened after my death.]

JOVIAN BELAMOUR.

Dec. 14th, 1727.

“I thought so,” said Mr. Belamour, when she returned to him with the intelligence. “Little did my poor brother guess how long it would be unopened! Will my gentle friend confer another obligation on me?”

Aurelia made her ready assent, hoping to be asked to read the letter, when he continued, “I cannot read this myself. Even could I bear the light, the attempt to fix my eyes sends darts shooting through my brain, which would take away my very power of comprehension. But,” he continued, “there are only two men living to whom I could entrust my brother’s last words to me. One, your own good father, is out of reach; the other has frequently proffered his good offices and has been rejected. Would you add to your kindness that of writing to entreat my old friend, Dr. Godfrey, to favour with a visit one who has too often and ungratefully refused him admission.”

Feminine curiosity felt balked, but Aurelia was ashamed of the sensation, and undertook the task. Instructions were given her that she was to write—

“If Amyas Belamour’s old Schoolfellow and

Friend can overlook and pardon the undeserved Rebuffs to His Constancy and Solicitude for a lonely and sullen Wretch, and will once more come and spend a Night at Bowstead, he will confer an inestimable Favour upon one who is more sensible of his Goodness than when it has been previously offered."

This letter, written in Aurelia's best Italian hand, on a large sheet of paper, she brought with her the next evening. She was bidden to fold down the exact place for the signature, which Mr. Belamour proceeded to affix, and she was then to carry it to the candle in the lobby, and there fold, seal, and address it to the Reverend Edward Godfrey, D.D., Canon of Windsor, Windsor. She found the A. Belamour very fairly written, except that it was not horizontal, and she performed the rest of the task with ladylike dexterity, sealing it with a ring that had been supplied for the purpose. It did not, as she had expected, bear the Belamour sheaf of arrows, but was a gem, representing a sleeping Cupid with folded wings, so beautiful that she asked leave to take

another impression for Harriet, who collected seals, after the fashion of the day.

"You are welcome," Mr. Belamour replied. "I doubt its great antiquity, since the story of Cupid and Psyche cannot be traced beyond Apuleius. I used it because Dr. Godfrey will remember it. He was with me at Rome when I purchased it."

The ring was of the size for a lady's finger, and Aurelia durst ask no more.

How the letter was sent she knew not, but Mrs. Aylward was summoned to Mr. Belamour's room, and desired to have a room ready at any time for his friend.

Three days later, towards sunset, a substantial-looking clergyman, attended by two servants, rode up to the door; and was immediately appropriated by Jumbo, disappearing into the mysterious apartments; Aurelia expected no summons that night, but at the usual hour, the negro brought a special request for the honour of her society; and as she entered the dark room, Mr. Belamour said, "My fair and charitable visitor will permit me to present to her my old and valued friend, Dr.

Godfrey. He laid the hand he had taken on one that returned a little gentlemanly acknowledgment, while a kind fatherly voice said, "The lady must pardon me if I do not venture to hand her to her chair."

"Thank you, sir, I am close to my seat."

"Your visitors acquire blind eyes, Belamour," said Dr. Godfrey, cheerfully.

"More truly they become eyes to the blind," was the answer. "I feel myself a man of the world again, since this amiable young lady has conned the papers on my behalf, and given herself the trouble of learning the choicest passages of the poets to repeat to me."

"You are very good, sir," returned Aurelia; "it is my great pleasure."

"That I can well believe," said Dr. Godfrey. "Have these agreeable recitations made you acquainted with the new poem on the *Seasons* by Mr. James Thomson?"

"No," replied Mr. Belamour, "my acquaintance with the *belles lettres* ceased nine years ago."

"The descriptions have been thought extremely

effective. Those of autumn were recalled to my mind on my way."

Dr. Godfrey proceeded to recite some twenty lines of blank verse, for in those days people had more patience and fewer books, and exercised their memories much more than their descendants do. Listening was far from being thought tedious.

" ' But see the fading many-coloured roads,
Shade deepening over shade, the country round
Imbrown ; a crowded umbrage, dusk and dim,
Of every hue, from wan, declining green,
To sooty dark.' "

The lines had a strange charm to one who had lived in darkness through so many revolving years. Mr. Belamour eagerly thanked his friend, and on the offer to lend him the book, begged that it might be ordered for him, and that any other new and interesting work might be sent to him that was suitable to the fair lips on which he was dependent.

" You are secure with Mr. Thomson," said the Doctor. " Hear the conclusion of his final hymn."

" ' When even at last the solemn hour shall come,
And wing my mystic flight to future worlds,

I cheerful will obey ; there with new powers
Will rising wonders sing. I cannot go
Where Universal Love not smiles around,
Sustaining all yon orbs, and all their suns,
From seeming evil still educing good,
And better thence again, and better still,
In infinite progression. But I lose
Myself in Him, in Light ineffable ;
Come then, expressive Silence, mine the praise.’”

“‘Universal Love!’” repeated Mr. Belamour ;
“the poet sings as you do, my amiable friend !
I can conceive the idea better than I could a few
months ago.”

“ ‘ From seeming evil, still educing good,’ ”

quoted Dr. Godfrey earnestly, as if feeling his
way.

“More of this another time,” said Mr. Belamour
hastily. “What say the critics respecting this new
aspirant ?”

The ensuing conversation much interested
Aurelia, as it was on the men of letters whose
names had long been familiar to her, and whom
the two gentlemen had personally known. She
heard of Pope, still living at Twickenham, and of
his bickerings with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu ;

of young Horace Walpole, who would never rival his father as a politician, but who was beginning his course as a *dilettante*, and actually pretending to prefer the barbarous Gothic to the classic Italian. However, his taste might be improved, since he was going to make the grand tour in company with Mr. Gray, a rising young poet, in whom Dr. Godfrey took interest, as an Etonian and a Cantab.

At nine o'clock Mr. Belamour requested Miss Delavie to let him depute to her the doing the honours of the supper table to his friend, who would return to him when she retired for the night.

Then it was that she first saw the guest, a fine, dignified clergyman, in a large grey wig, with a benignant countenance, reminding her of the Dean of Carminster. When she was little, the Dean had bestowed on her comfits and kisses ; but since she had outgrown these attentions, he was wont to notice her only by a condescending nod, and she would no more have thought of conversing with him at table than in his stall in the Cathedral.

Thus it was surprising to find herself talked to, as Betty might have been, by this reverend personage, who kindly satisfied her curiosity about the King, Queen, and Princesses, but with a discretion which did not diminish that blind loyalty which saw no defects in "our good king," though he was George II. She likewise answered a few questions about Mr. Belamour's tastes and habits, put in a very different manner from those of the Mistresses Treforth, and as soon as supper was over she rose and retired.

She did not see Dr. Godfrey again until he was ready for a late breakfast, having been up nearly the whole night with his friend. His horses were ordered immediately after the meal, as he had an appointment in London, and he began it somewhat thoughtfully ; but he presently looked up, and said,

"Madam, you must excuse me, I was silent from thinking how I can adequately express my respect and gratitude for you."

"I beg your pardon, sir," exclaimed Aurelia, thinking her ears mistaken.

“My gratitude,” he repeated, “for the inestimable blessing you have been to my dear and much valued friend, in rousing him from that wretched state of despondency in which no one could approach him.”

“You are too good, sir,” returned Aurelia. “It was he who sent for me.”

“I know you did it in all simplicity, my dear child—forgive the epithet, I have daughters of my own, and thankful should I be if one of them could have produced such effects. I tell you, madam, my dear friend, one of the most estimable and brilliant men of his day, was an utter wreck, both in mind and body, through the cruel machinations of an unprincipled woman. How much was due to the actual injury from his wound, how much to grief and remorse, Heaven only knows, but the death of his brother, who alone had authority with him, left him thus to cut himself off entirely in this utter darkness and despair. I called at first monthly, then yearly, after the melancholy catastrophe, and held many consultations with good Mr. Wayland, but all in vain.

It was reserved for your sweet notes to awaken and recall him to what I trust is indeed new life."

Tears filled Aurelia's eyes, and she could only murmur something about being very glad.

"Yes," pursued Dr. Godfrey, "it is as if I saw him rising from his living tomb in all senses of the word. I find that your artless Sunday evening conversations have even penetrated the inner hopeless gloom, still more grievous than the outer darkness in which he lived."

"Indeed, sir, I never meant to be presumptuous."

"God's blessing on such presumption, my good child! If you had been fully aware of his state of mind, you might never have ventured nor have touched the sealed heart, as you have done, as I perceive, in your ignorance, out of your obedient reverence to the Lord's day. Am I not right?"

"Yes, sir, I thought one *could* not repeat plays and poems on a Sunday, and I was frightened when I found those other things were strange to him; but he bade me go on."

"For the sake of the music of your voice, as

he tells me, at first ; but afterwards because you became the messenger of hope to one who had long lain in the shadow of death, thinking pardon and mercy too much out of reach to be sought for. You have awakened prayer within him once more."

She could not speak, and Dr. Godfrey continued, "You will be glad to hear that I am to see the curate on my way through Brentford, and arrange with him at times to read prayers in the outer room. What is it?" he added ; "you look somewhat doubtful."

"Only, sir, perhaps I ought not to say so, but I cannot think Mr. Belamour will ever care for poor Mr. Greaves. If he could only hear that gentleman who comes to Sedhurst ! I never knew how much fire could be put into the service itself, and yet I have often been at Carminster Cathedral."

"True, my dear young lady. These enthusiasts seem to be kindling a new fire in the Church, but I am not yet so convinced of their orthodoxy and wisdom as to trust them unreservedly ; and zeal pushed too far might offend our poor recluse, and

alienate him more than ever. He is likely to profit more by the direct words of the Church herself, read without personal meaning, than by the individual exhortations of some devout stranger."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, I never meant to question your judgment. Indeed I did not."

The horses were here announced, and Dr. Godfrey said,

"Then I leave him to you with a grateful heart. I am beginning to hope that there is much hypochondriacism in his condition, and that this may pass away with his despondency. I hope before many weeks are over to come and visit him again, before I go to my parish in Dorsetshire."

Then, with a fatherly blessing, the Canon took his leave.

He was scarcely gone before there was a great rustling in the hall, and Mrs. Phœbe and Mrs. Delia Treforth were announced. Aurelia was surprised, for she had been decidedly sensible of their disapproval when she made her visit of ceremony after her entertainment by them. She,

however, had underrated the force of the magnet of curiosity. They had come to inquire about the visitor, who had actually spent a night at the Park. They knew who he was, for "Ned Godfrey" had been a frequent guest at Bowstead in the youth of all parties, and they were annoyed that he had not paid his respects to them.

"It would have been only fitting to have sent for us, as relations of the family, to assist in entertaining him," said Mrs. Phœbe. "Pray, miss, did my eccentric cousin place you in the position of hostess?"

"It fell to me, madam," said Aurelia.

"You could have asked for *our* support," said Mrs. Phœbe, severely. "It would have become you better, above all when Sir Amyas Belamour himself was here."

"He has only been here while I was with you, madam, and was gone before my return."

"*That* is true," but Mrs. Phœbe looked at the girl so inquisitively that her colour rose in anger, and she exclaimed, "Madam, I know not what you mean!"

“There, sister,” said Mrs. Delia, more kindly. “She is but a child, and Bet Batley is a gossip. She would not know his Honour in the dark from the blackamoor going down to visit his sweetheart.”

Very glad was Aurelia when the ladies curtsied themselves out of her summer parlour, declaring they wished to speak to Mrs. Aylward, who she knew could assure them of the absurdity of these implied suspicions.

And Mrs. Aylward, who detested the two ladies, and repelled their meddling, stiffly assured them both of Miss Delavie’s discretion and her own vigilance, which placed visits from the young baronet beyond the bounds of possibility. Supposing his Honour should again visit his uncle, she should take care to be present at any interview with the young lady. She trusted that she knew her duty, and so did Miss Delavie.

CHAPTER XV.

THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY.

O bright *regina*, who made thee so faire,
Who made thy colour vermeilie and white?
Now marveile I nothing that ye do hight
The quene of love.—CHAUCER.

ONLY a week had elapsed before the quiet of Bowstead was again disturbed by the arrival of two grooms, with orders that everything should be made ready the next day for the arrival of my Lady, who was on her way to Carminster for a few weeks, and afterwards to Bath. Forthwith Mrs. Aylward and her subordinates fell into a frenzy of opening shutters, lighting fires, laying down carpets and uncovering furniture. Scrubbing was the daily task of the maids, and there was nothing extra possible in that line, but there was hurry enough to exacerbate the temper, and when

Aurelia offered her services she was tartly told that she could solely be useful by keeping the children out of the way ; for in spite of all rebuffs, they persisted in haunting the footsteps of the housekeeper and maids, Fay gazing with delight at the splendours that were revealed, Amy proffering undesired aid, Letty dancing in the most inconvenient places, romancing about her mamma and little brother, and making sure that her big beautiful brother was also coming.

They were very unwilling to let Aurelia call them away to practise them in bridling, curtsying, and saying " Yes, madam," according to the laws of good breeding so carefully inculcated by sister at home. So anxious was she that she tried them over and over again till they were wearied out, and became so cross and naughty that nothing restored good-humour except gathering blackberries to feast brother Archer.

The intelligence produced less apparent excitement in the dark chamber. When Aurelia, in an eager, awe-stricken voice began, " O sir, have you heard that my Lady is coming ? " he calmly replied,

"The sounds in the house have amply heralded her, to say nothing of Jumbo."

"I wonder what she will do!"

"You will not long have known her, my fair friend, without discovering that she is one of the most inscrutable of her sex. The mere endeavour to guess at her plans only produces harassing surmises and alarms."

"Do you think, sir, she can mean to take me away?"

"I suppose that would be emancipation to you, my poor child."

"I should dance to find myself going home," said Aurelia, "yet how could I bear to leave my little girls, or you, sir. Oh! if you could only live at the Great House, at home, I should be quite happy."

"Then you would not willingly abandon the recluse?"

"Indeed," she said with a quivering in her voice, "I cannot endure the notion. You have been so kind and good to me, sir, and I do so enjoy coming to you. And you would be all alone again with

Jumbo ! Oh sir, could you not drive down if all the coach windows were close shut up ? You would have my papa to talk to !”

“And what would your papa say to having a miserable old hermit inflicted on him ?”

“He would be only too glad.”

“No, no, my gentle friend, there are other reasons. I could not make my abode in Lady Belamour’s house, while in that of my nephew, my natural home, I have a right to drag out what remains of this existence of mine. Nay, are you weeping, my sweet child ? That must not be ; your young life must take no darkness from mine. Even should Lady Belamour’s arbitrary caprice bear you off without another meeting, remember that you have given me many more happy hours than I ever supposed to be in store for me, and have opened doors which shall not be closed again.”

“You will get some one to recite to you ?” entreated Aurelia, her voice most unsteady.

“Godfrey shall seek out some poor scholar or exhausted poetaster, with a proviso that he never inflicts his own pieces on me,” said Mr. Belamour,

in a tone more as if he wished to console her than as if it were a pleasing prospect. "Never fear, gentle monitress, I will not sink into the stagnation from which your voice awoke me. Neither Godfrey nor my nephew would allow it. Come, let us put it from our minds. It has always been my experience, that whatever I expected from my much admired sister-in-law, that was the exact reverse of what she actually did. Therefore let us attend to other topics, though I wager that you have no fresh acquisitions for me to-day."

"I am ashamed, sir, but I could not fix my mind even to a most frightful description of wolves in Mr. Thomson's 'Winter.'"

"That were scarcely a soothing subject ; but we might find calm in something less agitating and more familiar. Perhaps you can recall something too firmly imprinted on your memory to be disturbed by these emotions."

Aurelia bethought herself that she must not disappoint her friend on what might prove their last evening ; she began very unsteadily :—

“ ‘ Hence, loathed Melancholy.’ ”

However by the time "Jonson's learned sock" was on, her mechanical repetition had become animated, and she had restored herself to equanimity. When the clock struck nine, her auditor added to his thanks, "In case we should not meet again thus, let me beg of my kind visitor to wear this ring in memory of one to whom she has brought a breath indeed from L'Allegro itself. It will not be too large. It was made for a lady."

And amid her tearful thanks she felt a light kiss on her fingers, a kiss from hairy lips, revealing to her that the hermit must possess a beard, a fact, which in the close-shaven Hanoverian days, conveyed a sense of squalor and neglect almost amounting to horror.

In her own room she dropped many a tear over the ring, which was of course the Cupid intaglio, and she spent the night in strange mixed dreams and yearnings, divided between her father, Betty, and Eugene on the one hand, and Mr. Belamour and the children on the other. Home-sick as she sometimes felt, dull as Bowstead was, she should be sadly grieved to leave those to whom she felt

herself almost necessary, though her choice must needs be for her home.

Early the next day arrived an old roomy berlin, loaded heavily with luggage, and so stuffed with men and maids that four stout horses had much ado to bring it up to the door. The servants, grumbling heartily, declared that my Lady was only going to lie here for a single night, and that Sir Amyas was not with her.

Late in the afternoon, a couple of outriders appeared to say that the great lady was close at hand, and Aurelia, in her best blue sacque, and India muslin cap, edged with Flanders lace, had her three little charges, all in white with red shoes, red sashes, and red ribbons in their caps, drawn up in the hall to welcome their mother.

Up swept the coach with six horses, Mr. Dove enthroned on the driving seat, and a row of lackeys behind—runners in fact, who at times rested themselves by an upright swing on the foot-board.

The door of the gorgeous machine was thrown open, and forth sprang a pretty little boy. Next descended the friendly form of Mrs. Dove, then a

smart person, who was my Lady's own woman, and finally something dazzlingly grand and beautiful in feathers, light blue, and silver.

Aurelia made her reverence, and so did the little triad ; the great lady bent her head, and gave a light kiss to the brow of each child, and the boy sprang forward, crying : " You are my sisters. You must play with me, and do whatever I choose." Amoret and he began kissing on the spot, but Fidelia, regarding *must* as a forbidden word, looked up at Aurelia with an inquiring protest in her eyes ; but it was not heeded, in the doubt whether to follow Lady Belamour, who, with a stately greeting to Mrs. Alyward, had sailed into the withdrawing-room. The question was decided by Mrs. Aylward standing back to make room, and motioning her forward, so she entered, Letty preceding her and Fay clinging to her.

By the hearth stood the magnificent figure, holding out a long, beautiful, beringed hand, which Aurelia shyly kissed, bending as before a queen, while her forehead received the same slight salute as had been given to the little girls. " My cousin

Delavie's own daughter," said the lady: "You have the family likeness."

"So I have been told, madam."

"Your father is well, I hope."

"He was pretty well, I thank your Ladyship, when I heard from my sister ten days ago."

"I shall see him in a week's time, and shall report well of his little daughter," said Lady Belamour kindly. "I am under obligations to you, my dear. You seem to have tamed my little savages."

Aurelia was amazed, for the universal awe of my Lady had made her expect a harsh and severe Semiramis style of woman, whereas she certainly saw a majestic beauty, but with none of the terrors that she had anticipated. The voice was musical and perfectly modulated, the manner more caressing than imperious towards herself, and studiously polite to the housekeeper. While orders were being given as to arrangements, Aurelia took in the full details of the person of whom she had heard so much. It seemed incredible that Lady Belamour could have been mother to contemporaries

of Betty, for she looked younger than Betty herself. Her symmetry and carriage were admirable, and well shown by the light blue habit laced richly and embroidered with silver. A small round hat with a cluster of white ostrich feathers was placed among the slightly frizzed and powdered masses of mouse-coloured hair, surmounting a long ivory neck, whose graceful turn, the theme of many a sonnet, was not concealed by the masculine collar of the habit. The exquisite oval contour of the cheek, the delicate ear, and Grecian profile were as perfect in moulding as when she had been Sir Jovian's bride, and so were the porcelain blue of the eyes, the pencilled arches of eyebrow, and the curve of the lips, while even her complexion retained its smooth texture, and tints of the lily and rose. Often as Aurelia had heard of her beauty, its splendour dazzled and astonished her, even in this travelling dress.

Archer, who was about a year older than his sisters, was more like Amoret than the other two, with azure eyes, golden curls, and a plump rosy

face, full of fun and mischief. Tired of the confinement of the coach, he was rushing round the house with Amoret, opening the doors and looking into the rooms. The other little sisters remained beside Aurelia till their mother said, pointing to Fay: "That child seems to mean to eat me with her eyes. Let all the children be with Nurse Dove, Mrs. Aylward. Miss Delavie will do me the pleasure of supping with me at seven. Present my compliments to Mr. Belamour, and let him know that I will be with him at eight o'clock on particular business." Then turning to the two children, she asked their names, and was answered by each distinctly, with the orthodox "madam" at the end.

"You are improved, little ones," she said: "Did Cousin Aurelia teach you."

"And Mammy Rolfe," said constant Fay.

"She must teach you next not to stare," said Lady Belamour. "I intend to take one to be a companion to my boy, in the country. When I saw them before, they were rustic little monsters; but they are less unpresentable now. Call your

sister, children." And as the two left the room, she continued: "Which do you recommend, cousin?"

"Fidelia is the most reasonable, madam," said Aurelia.

"But not the prettiest, I trust. She is too like her father, with those dark brows, and her eyes have a look deep enough to frighten one. They will frighten away the men, if she do not grow out of it."

Here the door burst open, and, without any preliminary bow, Master Archer flew in, crying out "Mamma, mamma, we *must* stay here. The galleries are so long, and it is such a place for whoop-hide!"

His sisters were following his bad example, and rushing in with equal want of ceremony, but though their mother held the boy unchecked on her knee, Aurelia saw how she could frown. "You forget yourselves," she said.

Amoret looked ready to cry, but at a sign from their young instructress, they backed and curtsied, and their mother reviewed them; Letitia was the

most like the Delavies, but also the smallest, while Amoret was on the largest scale and would pair best with her brother, who besides loudly proclaimed his preference for her, and she was therefore elected to the honour of being taken home. Aurelia was requested as a favour to bid the children's woman have the child's clothes ready by ten o'clock on the morrow, and my Lady then repaired to her own room.

The little wardrobe could only be prepared by much assistance from Aurelia herself, and she could attend to nothing else; while the children were all devoted to Archer, and she only heard their voices in the distance, till—as she was dressing for her *tête-à-tête* supper—Fay came to her crying, “Archer was a naughty boy—he said wicked words—he called her ugly, and had cuffed and pinched her!”

Poor child! she was tired out, and disappointed, and Aurelia could only comfort her by hearing her little prayers, undressing her, and giving her the highly-esteemed treat of sleeping in Cousin Aura's bed; while the others were staying up as

long as it pleased Master Archer. This actually was the cause of my Lady being kept waiting, and an apology was needful. "Fidelia was tired out, and was crying."

"A peevish child! I am glad I did not choose her."

"She is usually very good, madam," said Aurelia, eagerly.

"Is she your favourite?"

"I try not to make favourites, madam."

"Ah! there spoke the true Manor House tone," said her Ladyship, rather mockingly. "Maybe she will be a wit, for she will never be a beauty, but the other little one will come on in due time after Amoret."

"Your Ladyship will find Amoret a dear, good, affectionate child," said Aurelia. "Only ——"

"Reserve that for nurse, so please you, my good girl. It is enough for me to see the brats on their good manners now and then. You have had other recreations—shall I call them, or cares? I never supposed, when I sent you here to attend on the children, that the hermit of Bowstead would

summon you ! I assure you it is an extraordinary honour."

"I so esteem it, madam," said Aurelia, blushing.

"More honour than pleasure, eh ?"

"A great pleasure, madam."

"Say you so ?" and the glittering blue eyes were keenly scanning the modest face. "I should have thought a young maid like you would have had the dismals at the mere notion of going near his dark chamber. I promise you it gives me the megrim to look forward to it."

"I was affrighted at first, madam," said Aurelia ; "but Mr. Belamour is so good and kind to me that I exceedingly enjoy the hours I spend with him."

"La, child, you speak with warmth ! We shall have you enamoured of a voice like the youth they make sonnets about—what's his name ?"

"Narcissus, madam," said Aurelia, put out of countenance by the banter.

"Oh, you are learned. Is Mr. Belamour your tutor, pray ? And—oh, fie ! I have seen that ring before !"

"He gave it to me yesterday," faltered Aurelia,

“in case you should intend to take me away, and I should not see him again. I hope I was not wrong in accepting it, madam.”

“Wrong, little fool, assuredly not,” said my Lady, laughing. “It is an ensign of victory. Why, child, you have made a conquest worthy of—let me see. You, or the wits, could tell me who it was that stormed the very den of Cocytus and bore off the spoil !”

Aurelia liked the tone too little to supply the names ; yet she felt flattered ; but she said quietly, “I am happy to have been the means of cheering him.”

The grave artlessness of the manner acted as a kind of check, and Lady Belamour said in a different tone, “ Seriously, child, the family are truly obliged for your share in rousing the poor creature from his melancholy. My good man made the attempt, but all in vain. What do you do to divert him ? ”

In inquiries of this kind the supper hour passed, and Lady Belamour was then to keep her appointment with her brother-in-law. She showed so

much alarm and dread that Aurelia could not but utter assurances and encouragements, which again awoke that arch manner, partly bantering, partly flattering, which exercised a sort of pleasant perplexing fascination on the simple girl.

After being dismissed, Aurelia went in search of Mrs. Dove, whom she found with Molly, taking stock of Amoret's little wardrobe. The good woman rose joyfully. "Oh, my dear missie! I am right thankful to see you looking so purely. I don't know how I could have held up my head to Miss Delavie if I had not seen you!"

"Ah! you will see my sister and all of them," cried Aurelia, a sudden rush of home-sickness bringing tears to her eyes, in oblivion alike of her recluse and her pupils. "Oh! if I were but going with you! But what folly am I talking? You must not let them think I am not happy, for indeed I am. Will you kindly come to my room, dear nurse, and I will give you a packet for them?"

Mrs. Dove willingly availed herself of the opportunity of explaining how guiltless she had been

of the sudden separation at Knightsbridge four months back. She had been in such haste to ride after and overtake the coach, that she had even made Dove swear at her for wanting to give the horses no time to rest, and she had ridden off on her own particular pillion long before the rest. She had been surprised that she never succeeded in catching up the carriage, but never suspected the truth till she had dismounted in Hanover Square and asked whether "Miss" were with my Lady. Nobody knew anything about Miss Delavie, nor expected her; and the good woman's alarm was great until she had had an interview with her Ladyship, when she was told not to concern herself about the young lady, who was safely bestowed in the country with the Misses Wayland. "But that it was here, if you'll believe me, missie, I was as innocent as the babe unborn, and so was his Honour, Sir Amyas. Indeed, my Lady gave him to understand that she had put you to boarding-school with his little sisters."

"Oh! nurse, that is impossible!"

"Lawk-a-day, missie, there's nothing my Lady

wouldn't say to put him off the scent. Bless you, 'tis not for us servants to talk, or I could tell you tales! But there, mum's the word, as my Dove says, or he wouldn't ha' sat on his box these twenty year!"

"My Lady is very kind to me," said Aurelia, with a little assumption of her father's repressive manner.

"I'm right glad to hear it, Miss Aureely. A sweet lady she can be when she is in the mood, though nothing like so sweet as his Honour. 'Tis ingrain with him down to the bone, as I may say—and I should know, having had him from the day he was weaned. To see him come up to the nussery, and toss about his little brother, would do your very heart good; and then he sits him down, without a bit of pride, and will have me tell him all about our journey up to Lunnon, and the fair, and the play and all; and the same with Dove in the stables. He would have the whole story, and how we was parted at Knightsbridge, I never so much as guessing where you was—you that your sister had given into my care! At last

one day when I was sitting a darning of stockings in the window at the back, where I can see out over to the green fields, up his Honour comes, and says he, with his finger to his lips, ‘Set your heart at rest, nurse, I’ve found her!’ Then he told me how he went down to see his old uncle. Mr. Wayland had been urging him on one side that ’twas no more than his duty; and her Ladyship, on the other, would have it that Mr. Belamour was right down melancholy mad, and would go into a raving fit if his nevvvy did but go near the place.”

“She did not say that!”

“Oh yes, she did, miss, I’ll take my oath of it, for I was in the coach with Master Wayland on my knee, when she was telling a lady how hard it was they could have no use of Bowstead, because of Sir Jovian’s brother being there, who had got the black melancholics, and could not be removed. The lady says how good she was to suffer it, and she answers, that there was no being harsh with poor Sir Jovian’s brother, though he had a strange spleen at her and her son, and always grew worse when they did but go near

the house ; but that some measures must be taken when her son came of age or was married."

"But he came at last!"

"He said he wanted to see for himself, and thought he could at least find out from the servants whether his uncle was in the state they reported. And there he found his three little sisters, and that you was their tutoress, and they couldn't say enough about you, nor the poor gentleman neither. 'I didn't see her, nurse,' says he, 'but there's a bit of her own sweet fingers' work.' And sure enough, I knew it, for it was a knot of the very ribbon you had in your hair the day I came to talk to your sister about the journey."

"That was what Amy told me she gave him."

"Nothing loth would he be to take it, miss! Though says he, 'Don't you let my mother know I have tracked her, nurse,' says he. 'It is plain enough why she gives out that I am not to go near my uncle, and if she guessed where I had been, she would have some of her fancies.' 'Now your Honour, my dear,' says I, 'you'll excuse your

old nurse, but her sister put her in my charge, and though I bless Heaven that you are no young rake, yet you will be bringing trouble untold on her and hers if you go down there a courting of her unbeknownst.' 'No danger of that, nurse,' says he; 'why there's a she-dragon down there (meaning Mrs. Aylward) that was ready to drive me out of my own house when I did but speak of waiting to see her.'"

"No, I am glad he will not come again. Yet it makes his uncle happy to see him. I will keep out of the way if he does."

"Right too, miss. A young lady never loses by discretion."

"Oh, do not speak in—in that way," said Aurelia, blushing at the implication. "Besides, he is going home with my Lady to dear Carminster."

"No, no, he remains with his regiment in town, unless he rides down later when he can have his leave of absence, and my Lady is at the Bath. He will not if he can help it, for he is dead set against the young lady they want to marry him to, and she is to be there. What! you have not heard?

It is my Lady Arabella, sister to that there Colonel as is more about our house than I could wish. She is not by the same mother as him and my Lord Aresfield. Her father married a great heiress for his second wife, whose father had made a great fortune by victualling the army in the war time. Not that this Dowager Countess, as they call her, is a bit like the real quality, so that it is a marvel how my Lady can put up with her ; only money-bags will make anything go down, more's the pity, and my Lady is pressed, you see, with her losses at play. It was about this match that Sir Amyas was sent down to Battlefield, the Countess's place in Monmouthshire, when he came to Carminster last summer, and his body servant, Mr. Grey, that has been about him from a child, told me all about it. This Lady Belle, as they call her, is only about fourteen, and such a spoilt little vixen, that they say nobody has been able to teach her so much as to read, for her mother, the Dowager, never would have her crossed in anything, and now she has got too headstrong for any of 'em. Mr. Grey said

the evening they arrived, while his honour was dressing for supper, they heard the most horrid screams, and thought some one must be killed at least. Sir Amyas was for running out, but at the door they met a wench who only said, 'Bless you! that's nought. It's only my young lady in her tantrums!' So in the servants' hall, Grey heard it was all because her mamma wouldn't let her put on two suits of pearls and di'monds both together. She lies on her back, and rolls and kicks till she gets her own way; and by what the servants say, the Dowager herself ain't much better to her servants. Her woman had got a black eye she had given her with her fan. She has never had no breeding, you see, and there are uglier stories about her than I like to tell you, Miss Aureely; and as to the young lady, Sir Amyas saw her with his own eyes slap the lackey's face for bringing her brown sugar instead of white. She is a little dwarfish thing that puts her finger in her mouth and sulks when she is not flying out into a rage; but Colonel Mar is going to have her up to a boarding-school to mend her manners,

and he and my lady are as much bent on marrying his Honour to her as if she was a perfect angel."

"They never can!"

"Well, miss, they do most things they have a mind to; and they mean to do this before my Lady's husband comes home."

"But Mr. Belamour is his nephew's guardian."

"That's what my Lady is come down here for. Either she will get his consent out of him, or she will make the poor gentleman out to be *non compos*, and do without him."

"Oh, nurse, he is the wisest, cleverest gentleman I ever saw, except my papa."

"Do you say so, miss? But you are young, you see. A gentleman to shut himself up in the dark like that must needs be astray in his wits."

"That is because of his eyes, and his wound. Nobody could talk to him and doubt his reason."

"Well, missie, I hope you are in the right; but what my Lady's interest is, that she is apt to carry out, one way or t'other! Bless me,

if that be not Master Archer screaming. I thought he was fast off to sleep. There never was such a child for hating the dark. Yes, yes, I'm coming, my dearie! Lack a daisy, if his mamma heard!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AUGURIES.

Venus, thy eternal sway
All the race of man obey.

EURIPIDES (*Anstice*).

AURELIA sat up late to finish her despatches to the beloved ones at home, and pack the little works she had been able to do for each, though my Lady's embroidery took up most of her sedentary hours. Mrs. Dove undertook the care of the parcel, and handed over to Aurelia another—a guinea's worth of presents to the little sisters from Sir Amyas, which the prudent nurse advised her to withhold till after Master Archer was gone, as he would certainly break everything to pieces. He was up betimes, careering about the garden with all his sisters after him, imperiously ordering them about, but nevertheless bewitching them all,

so that Amoretta was in ecstasies at her own preferment, scarcely realising that it would divide her from the others ; while Letty made sure that she should soon follow, and Fidelia gravely said, "I shall always know you are loving me still, Amy, as Nurse Rolfe does."

Lady Belamour breakfasted in her own room at about ten o'clock. Her woman, Mrs. Loveday, a small trim active person, with the worn and sharpened remains of considerable prettiness of the miniature brunette style, was sent to summon Miss Delavie to her apartment and inspect the embroidery she had been desired to execute for my Lady. Three or four bouquets had been finished, and the maid went into such raptures over them as somewhat to disgust their worker, who knew that they were not half so well done as they would have been under Betty's direction. However, Mrs. Loveday bore the frame to her Ladyship's room, following Aurelia, who was there received with the same stately caressing manner as before.

"Good morning, child. Your roses bloom well

in the forenoon! Pity they should be wasted in darkness. Not but that you are duly appreciated there. Ah! I can deepen them by what our unhappy recluse said of you. I shall make glad hearts at Carminster by his good opinion, and who knows what preferment may come of it—eh? What is that, Loveday?"

"It is the work your Ladyship wished me to execute," said Aurelia.

"Handsome—yes; but is that all? I thought the notable Mistress Betty brought you up after her own sort?"

"I am sorry, madam, but I could not do it quickly at first without my sister's advice, and I have not very much time between my care of the children and preparing repetitions for Mr. Belamour."

"Ha! ha! I understand. There are greater attractions! Go on, child. Mayhap it may be your own wedding gown you are working at, if you finish it in time! Heavens! what great wondering eyes the child has! All in good time, my dear. I must talk to your father."

It was so much the custom to talk to young maidens about their marriage that this did not greatly startle Aurelia, and Lady Belamour continued: "There, child, you have done your duty well by those little plagues of mine, and it is Mr. Wayland's desire to make you a recompense. You may need it in any change of circumstances."

So saying, she placed in Aurelia's hand five guineas, the largest sum that the girl had ever owned; and as visions arose of Christmas gifts to be bestowed, the thanks were so warm, the curtsy so expressively graceful, the smile so bright, the soft eyes so sparkling, that the great lady was touched at the sight of such simple-hearted joy, and said, "There, there, child, that will do. I could envy one whom a little makes so happy. Now you will be able to make yourself fine when my son brings home his bride; or—who knows?—you may be a bride yourself first!"

That sounds, thought Aurelia, as if Mr. Belamour had made her relinquish the plan of that

cruel marriage, for I am sure I have not yet seen the man I am to marry.

And with a lighter heart the young tutoress stood between Fay and Letty on the steps to see the departure, her cheeks still feeling Amoret's last fond kisses, and a swelling in her throat bringing tears to her eyes at the thought how soon that carriage would be at Carminster. Yet there were sweet chains in the little hands that held her gown, and in the thought of the lonely old man who depended on her for enlivenment.

The day was long, for Amoret was missed; and the two children were unusually fretful and quarrelsome without her, disputing over the new toys which Brother Amyas's guinea had furnished in demoralising profusion. It was strange to see the difference made by the loss of the child who would give up anything rather than meet a look of vexation, and would coax the others into immediate good humour. There was reaction, too, after the excitement, for which the inexperienced Aurelia did not allow. At the twentieth bickering as to which doll should ride on

the spotted hobby-horse, the face of Letty's painted wooden baby received a scar, and Fay's lost a leg, whereupon Aurelia's endurance entirely gave way, and she pronounced them both naughty children, and sent them to bed before supper.

Then her heart smote her for unkindness, and she sat in the firelight listless and sad, though she hardly knew why, longing to go up and pet and comfort her charges, but withheld by the remembrance of Betty's assurances that leniency, in a like case, would be the ruin of Eugene.

At last Jumbo came to summon her, and hastily recalling a cheerful air, she entered the room with "Good evening, sir; you see I am still here to trouble you."

"I continue to profit by my gentle friend's banishment. Tell me, was my Lady in a gracious mood?"

"O sir, how beautiful she is, and how kind! I know now why my father was so devoted to her, and no one can ever gainsay her!"

"The enchantress knows how to cast her spells. She was then friendly?"

"She gave me five guineas!" said Aurelia exultingly. "She said Mr. Wayland wished to recompense me."

"Did he so? If it came from him I should have expected a more liberal sum."

"But, oh!" in a tone of infinite surprise and content, "this is more than I ever thought of. Indeed I never dreamt of her giving me anything. Sir, may I write to your bookseller, Mr. Tonson, and order a book of Mr. James Thomson's *Seasons* to give to my sister Harriet, who is delighted with the extracts I have copied for her?"

"Will not that consume a large proportion of the five guineas, my generous friend?"

"I have enough left. There is a new gown which I never have worn, which will serve for the new clothes my lady spoke of to receive her son's bride."

"She entered on that subject then?"

"Only for a moment as she took leave. Oh, sir, is it possible that she can know all about this young lady?"

“What have you heard of her?”

“Sir, they say she is a dreadful little vixen.”

“Who say? Is she known at Carminster?”

“No, sir,” said Aurelia, disconcerted. “It was from Nurse Dove that I heard what Sir Amyas’s man said when he came back from Battlefield. I know my sister would chide me for listening to servants.”

“Nevertheless I should be glad to hear. Was the servant old Grey? Then he is to be depended on. What did he say?”

Aurelia needed little persuasion to tell all that she had heard from Mrs. Dove, and he answered, “Thank you, my child, it tallies precisely with what the poor boy himself told me.”

“Then he has told his mother? Will she not believe him?”

“It does not suit her to do so, and it is easy to say the girl will be altered by going to a good school. In fact, there are many reasons more powerful with her than the virtue and happiness of her son,” he added bitterly. “There’s the connection, forsooth. As if Lady Aresfield were fit

to bring up an honest man's wife ; and there's the fortune to fill up the void she has made in the Delavie estates."

"Can no one hinder it, sir? Cannot you?"

"As a last resource the poor youth came hither to see whether the guardian whose wardship has hitherto been a dead letter, were indeed so utterly obdurate and helpless as had been represented."

"And you have the power?"

"So far as his father's will and the injunctions of his final letter to me can give it, I have full power. My consent is necessary to his marriage while still a minor, and I have told my lady I will never give it to his wedding a Mar."

"I was sure of it; and it is not true that they will be able to do without it?"

"Without it! Have you heard any more? You pause. I see—she wishes to declare me of unsound mind. Is that what you mean?"

"So Nurse Dove said, sir," faltered Aurelia ; "but it seemed too wicked, too monstrous, to be possible."

"I understand," he said. "I thought there was an

implied threat in my sweet sister-in-law's soft voice when she spoke of my determined misanthropy. Well, I think we can guard against that expedient. After all, it is only till my nephew comes of age, or till his stepfather returns, that we must keep the enchantress at bay. Then the poor lad will be safe, providing always that she and her Colonel have not made a rake of him by that time. Alas, what a wretch am I not to be able to do more for him! Child, you have seen him?"

"I danced with him, sir, but I was too much terrified to look in his face. And I saw his cocked hat over the thorn hedge."

"Fancy free," muttered Mr. Belamour. "Fair exile for a cocked hat and diamond shoe-buckles! You would not recognise him again, nor his voice?"

"No, sir. He scarcely spoke, and I was attending to my steps."

Mr. Belamour laughed, and then asked Aurelia for the passage in the *Iliad* where Venus carries off Paris in a cloud. He thanked her somewhat absently, and then said,

“Dr. Godfrey said something of coming hither before he goes to his living in Dorsetshire. May I ask of you the favour of writing and begging him to fix a day not far off, mentioning likewise that my sister-in-law has been here.”

To this invitation Dr. Godfrey replied that he would deviate from the slow progress of his family coach, and ride to Bowstead, spending two nights there the next week; and to Aurelia's greater amazement, she was next requested to write a billet to the Mistresses Treforth in Mr. Belamour's name, asking them to bestow their company on him for the second evening of Dr. Godfrey's visit.

“You, my kind friend, will do the honours,” he said, “and we will ask Mrs. Aylward to provide the entertainment.”

“They will be quite propitiated by being asked to meet Dr. Godfrey,” said Aurelia. “Shall you admit them, sir?”

“Certainly. You do not seem to find them very engaging company, but they can scarce be worse than I should find in such an asylum as

my charming sister-in-law seems to have in preparation for me."

"Oh! I wish I had said nothing about that. It is too shocking!"

"Forewarned, forearmed, as the proverb says. Do you not see, my amiable friend, that we are providing a body of witnesses to the sanity of the recluse, even though he may 'in dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell'?"

The visit took place; Dr. Godfrey greeted Miss Delavie as an old friend, and the next day pronounced Mr. Belamour to be so wonderfully invigorated and animated, that he thought my lady's malignant plan was really likely to prove the best possible stimulus and cure.

Then the Canon gratified the two old ladies by a morning call, dined with Aurelia and her pupils, who behaved very well, and with whom he afterwards played for a whole hour so kindly that they placed him second in esteem to their big and beautiful brother. Mrs. Phœbe and Mrs. Delia came dressed in the faded splendours of the Louis XIV. period, just at twilight, and were regaled

with coffee and pound cake. They were a good deal subdued, though as Aurelia listened to the conversation, it was plain enough what Mr. Belamour meant when he said that his cousin Delia was something of the coquette.

Still they asked with evident awe if it were true that their unfortunate cousin really intended to admit them, and they evidently became more and more nervous while waiting for Jumbo's summons. Dr. Godfrey gave his arm to Mrs. Phœbe, and Mrs. Delia gripped hold of Aurelia's, trembling all over, declaring she felt ready to swoon, and marvelling how Miss Delavie could ever have ventured, all alone too!

After all, things had been made much less formidable than at Aurelia's first introduction. The sitting-room was arranged as it was when Mr. Greaves read prayers, with a very faint light from a shrouded lamp behind the window curtain. To new comers it seemed pitchy darkness, but to Aurelia and Dr. Godfrey it was a welcome change, allowing them at least to perceive the forms of one another, and of the furniture. From a blacker gulf, being

the doorway to the inner room, came Mr. Belamour's courteous voice of greeting to his kinswomen, who were led up by their respective guides to take his hand; after which he begged them to excuse the darkness, since the least light was painful to him still. If they would be seated he would remain where he was, and enjoy the society he was again beginning to be able to appreciate. He was, in fact, sitting within his own room, with eyes covered from even the feeble glimmer in the outer room.

It was some minutes before they recovered their self-possession, but Dr. Godfrey and Mr. Belamour began the conversation, and they gradually joined in. It was chiefly full of reminiscences of the lively days when Dr. Godfrey had been a young Cantab visiting his two friends at Bowstead, and Phœbe and Delia were the belles of the village. Aurelia scarcely opened her lips, but she was astonished to find how different the two sisters could be from the censorious, contemptuous beings they had seemed to her. The conversation lasted till supper-time, and Mr. Belamour, as they took their leave, made

them promise to come and see him again. Then they were conducted back to the supper-room, Mrs. Phœbe mysteriously asking "Is he always like this?"

The experiment had been a great success, and Aurelia completed it by asking Mrs. Phœbe to take the head of the supper-table.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VICTIM DEMANDED.

And if thou sparest now to do this thing,
I will destroy thee and thy land also.—MORRIS.

“WELL, sir, have you seen my Lady?”

“Not a year older than when I saw her last,” returned Major Delavie, who had just dismounted from his trusty pony at his garden gate, and accepted Betty’s arm; “and what think you?” he added, pausing that Corporal Palmer might hear his news. “She has been at Bowstead, and brings fresh tidings of our Aura. The darling is as fair and sprightly as a May morning, and beloved by all who come near her—bless her!”

Palmer echoed a fervent “Amen!” and Betty asked, “Is this my Lady’s report?”

“Suspicious Betty! You will soon be satisfied,” said the Major in high glee. “Did not Dove meet me at the front door, and Mrs. Dove way-lay me in the hall to tell me that the child looked blooming and joyous, and in favour with all, gentle and simple? Come here, Eugene, ay, and Harriet and Arden too. Let us hear what my little maid says for herself. For look here!” and he held aloft Aurelia’s packet, at sight of which Eugene capered high, and all followed into the parlour.

Mr. Arden was constantly about the house. There was no doubt that he would soon be preferred to a Chapter living in Buckinghamshire, and he had thus been emboldened to speak out his wishes. It would have been quite beneath the dignity of a young lady of Miss Harriet’s sensibility to have consented, and she was in the full swing of her game at coyness and reluctance, daily vowing that nothing should induce her to resign her liberty, and that she should be frightened out of her life by Mr. Arden’s experiments; while her father had cordially received the Minor Canon’s

proposals, and already treated him as one of the family. Simpering had been such a fattening process that Harriet was beginning to resume more of her good looks than had ever been brought back by Maydew.

“Open the letter, Betty. Thanks, Arden,” as the minor Canon began to pull off his boots, “only take care of my knee. My Lady has brought down her little boy, and one of Aurelia’s pupils; I declare they are a perfect pair of Loves. What are you fumbling at, Betty?”

“The seal, sir, it is a pity to break it,” said Betty, producing her scissors from one of her capacious pockets. “It is an antique, is it not, Mr. Arden?”

“A very beautiful gem, a sleeping Cupid,” he answered.

“How could the child have obtained it?” said Harriet.

“I can tell you,” said the Major. “From old Belamour. My Lady was laughing about it. The little puss has revived the embers of gallantry in our poor recluse. Says she, ‘He has actually

presented her with a ring, nay, a ring bearing Love himself.' ”

Somewhat the speech, even at second hand, jarred upon Betty, but her father was delighted with my Lady's description of his favourite, and the letters were full of contentment. When the two sisters, arrayed in their stiffest silks, went up to pay their respects to my Lady the next afternoon, their reception was equally warm. My Lady was more caressing to her old acquaintance, Betty, than that discreet personage quite liked, while she complimented and congratulated Harriet on her lover, laughing at her bashful disclaimers in such a charmingly teasing fashion as quite to win the damsel's heart, and convince her that all censure of Lady Belamour was vile slander. The children were sent for, and Amoret was called on to show how Cousin Aurelia had taught her to dance, sing, and recite. The tiny minuet performed by her and Archer was an exceedingly pretty exhibition as far as it went, but the boy had no patience to conclude, and jumped off into an extemporary *pas seul*, which was still prettier, and as Amoret

was sole exhibitor of the repetition of Gay's "Hare and many friends," he became turbulent after the first four lines, and put a stop to the whole.

Then came in a tall, large, handsome, dashing-looking man, with the air of a "*beau sabreur*," whom Lady Belamour presented to her cousins as "Colonel Mar, my son's commandant, you know, who has been kind enough to take Carminster on his way, so as to escort me to the Bath. I am such a sad coward about highwaymen. And we are to meet dear Lady Aresfield there to talk over a little matter of business."

Colonel Mar made a magnificent bow, carelessly, not to say impertinently, scanned the two ladies, and having evidently decided that they had neither beauty nor fashion to attract him, caught up little Amy in his arms, and began to play a half teasing, half caressing game with the children. Betty thought it high time to be gone, and as she took leave, was requested to send up her little brother to play with his cousins. This did not prove a success, for Eugene constituted himself champion

to Amoret, of whom Archer was very jealous, though she was his devoted and submissive slave. Master Delavie's rustic ways were in consequence pronounced to be too rude and rough for the dainty little town-bred boy, the fine ladies' pet.

The Major dined at the Great House, but came home so much dismayed and disgusted that he could hardly mention even to Betty what he had seen and heard. He only groaned out at intervals, "This is what the service is coming to! That fop to be that poor lad's commanding officer! That rake to be always hovering about my cousin!"

Others spoke out more plainly. Stories were afloat of orgies ending in the gallant Colonel being under the supper table, a thing only too common, but not in the house of a solitary lady who had only lately quitted the carousers. Half the dependants on the estate were complaining of the guest's swaggering overbearing treatment of themselves, or of his insolence to their wives or daughters; and Betty lived in a dreadful unnamed terror lest he should offer some impertinence to her father which

the veteran's honour might not brook. However, there was something in the old soldier's dignity and long service that kept the arrogance of the younger man in check, and repressed all bluster towards him.

Demands for money were, as usual, made, but the settlement of accounts was deferred till the arrival of Hargrave, the family man of business, who came by coach to Bath, and then rode across to Carminster. The Major dined that day at the Great House, and came home early, with something so strange and startled about his looks that Betty feared that her worst misgivings were realised. It was a relief to hear him say, "Come hither, Betty, I want a word with you." At least it was no duel!

"What is it, dear sir?" she asked, as she shut his study door. "Is it come at last? Must we quit this place?"

"No, I could bear that better, but what do you think she asks of me now?—to give my little Aurelia, my beautiful darling, to that poor madman in the dark!"

“Oh!” exclaimed Betty, in a strange tone of discovery. “May I inquire what you said?”

“I said—I scarce know what I said. I declared it monstrous, and not to be thought of for a moment; and then she went on in her fashion that would wile a bird off a bush, declaring that no doubt the proposal was a shock, but if I would turn the matter over, I should see it was for the dear child’s advantage. Belamour dotes on her, and after being an old man’s darling for a few years, she may be free in her prime, with an honourable name and fortune.”

“I dare say. As if one could not see through the entire design. My Lady would call her sister-in-law to prevent her being daughter-in-law!”

“That fancy has had no aliment, and must long ago have died out.”

“Listen to Nurse Dove on that matter.”

“Women love to foster notions of that sort.”

“Nay, sir, you believe, as I do, that the poor child was conveyed to Bowstead in order that the youth might lose sight of her, and since he

proves refractory to the match intended for him, this further device is found for destroying any possible hope on his part."

"I cannot say what may actuate my Lady, but if Amyas Belamour be the man I knew, and as the child's own letters paint him, he is not like to lend himself to any such arrangement."

"Comes the offer from him, or is it only a scheme of my Lady's?"

"He never writes more than a signature, but Hargrave is empowered to make proposals to me, very handsome proposals too, were not the bare idea intolerable."

"Aurelia is not aware of it, I am sure," said Betty, to whom Hargrave had brought another packet of cheerful innocent despatches, of which, as usual, the unseen friend in the dark was the hero.

"Certainly not, and I hope she never may be. I declared the notion was not to be entertained for a moment; but Urania never, in her life, would take no for an answer, and she talked me nearly out of my senses, then bade me go home,

think it over, and discuss it with my excellent and prudent daughter ; as if all the thinking and talking in the world could make it anything but more intolerable."

His prudent daughter understood in the adjective applied to her a hint which the wily lady would not have dared to make direct to the high-spirited old soldier, namely, that the continuance of his livelihood might depend on his consent. Betty knew likewise enough of the terrible world of the early eighteenth century to be aware that even such wedlock as this was not the worst to which a woman like Lady Belamour might compel the poor girl, who was entirely in her power, and out of reach of all protection ; unless— An idea broke in on her—" If we could but go to Bowstead, sir," she said, " then we could judge whether the notion be as repugnant to Aurelia as it is to us, and whether Mr. Belamour be truly rational and fit to be trusted with her."

" I tell you, Betty, it is a mere absurdity to think of it. I believe the child is fond of, and grateful to, the poor man, but if she supposed

she loved him, it would be mere playing on her ignorance."

"Then we could take her safely home and bear the consequences together, without leaving her alone exposed to any fresh machinations of my Lady."

"You are right, Betty. You have all your sainted mother's good sense. I will tell my cousin that this is not a matter to be done blindly, and that I withhold my reply till I have seen and spoken with her and this most preposterous of suitors."

"Yes, it is the only way," said Betty. "We can then judge whether it be a cruel sacrifice, or whether the child have affection and confidence enough in him to be reasonably happy with him. What is his age, father?"

"Let me see. Poor Sir Jovian was much older than Urania, but he died at forty years old. His brother was some three years his junior. He cannot be above forty-six or seven. That is not the objection, but the moody melancholy—Think of our gay sprightly child!"

“ We will see, sir.”

“ We! Mistress Betty? The cost will be severe without you!”

“ Nay, sir, I cannot rest without going too; you might be taken ill.”

“ You cannot trust a couple of old campaigners like Palmer and me? What did we do without you?”

“ Got lamed for life,” said Betty, saucily. “ No, I go on a pillion behind Palmer, and my grandfather’s diamond ring shall pay expenses.”

“ Sir Archibald’s ring that he put on two baby fingers of yours when he went off to Scotland.”

“ Better part with that than resign my Aurelia in the dark, uncertain whether it be for her good.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PROPOSAL.

Love sweetest lies concealed in night.—T. MOORE.

THE Major rode up to the Great House to announce that he would only give his answer after having conferred with both his daughter and the suitor.

With tears in her beautiful blue eyes, Lady Belamour demanded why her dear cousin Harry could not trust the Urania he had known all her life to decide what was for the happiness of the sweet child whom she loved like her own.

She made him actually feel as if it were a cruel and unmerited suspicion, but she did not overcome him. “Madam,” he said, “it would be against my orders, as father of a family, to give

my child away without doing my poor best for her."

There, in spite of all obstacles suggested and all displeasure manifested, he stuck fast, until, thoroughly harassed and annoyed, he rode home without choosing to wait till a shower of sleet and rain was over. Vexation and perplexity always overset his health, and the chill, added to them, rendered him so ill the next morning that Betty knew there was no chance of his leaving his room for the next month or six weeks ; and she therefore sent a polite and formal note to the Great House explaining that he could not attend to business.

This brought upon her the honour of a visit from the great lady herself. Down came the coach-and-four, and forth from it came Lady Belamour in a magnificent hoop, the first seen in those parts, managing it with a grace that made her an overwhelming spectacle, in contrast with Betty, in her close-fitting dark-grey homespun, plain white muslin apron, cap, kerchief, and ruffles, scrupulously neat and fresh, but

unadorned. The visit was graciously designed for "good cousin Harry," but his daughter was obliged, not unwillingly, though quite truly, to declare him far too suffering with pain and fever to receive the honour.

"La, you there, then," said the lady, "that comes of the dear man's heat of temper. I would have kept him till the storm was over but he was far too much displeased with his poor cousin to listen to me. Come, cousin Betty, I know you are in all his counsels. You will bring him to hear reason."

"The whole affair must wait, madam, till he is able to move."

"And if this illness be the consequence of one wet ride, how can he be in a condition to take the journey?"

"You best know, madam, whether a father can be expected to bestow his daughter in so strange a manner without direct communication either with her or with the other party."

"I grant you the idea is at first sight startling, but surely he might trust to me; and he knows

Amyas Belamour, poor man, to be the very soul of honour; yes, and with all his eccentricity to have made no small impression on our fair Aurelia. Depend upon it, my dear Betty, romance carries the day; and the damsel is more enamoured of the mysterious voice in the dark, than she would be of any lusty swain in the ordinary light of day."

"All that may be, madam, but she is scarce yet sixteen, and it is our duty to be assured of her inclinations and of the gentleman's condition."

"You will not trust me, who have watched them both," said Lady Belamour, with her most engaging manner. "Now look here, my dear, since we are two women together, safe out of the hearing of the men, I will be round with you. I freely own myself imprudent in sending your sister to Bowstead to take charge of my poor little girls, but if you had seen the little savages they were, you would not wonder that I could not take them home at once, nor that I should wish to see them acquire the good manners that I remembered in the children of this house; I never

dreamt of Mr. Belamour heeding the little nursery. He has always been an obstinate melancholic lunatic, confined to his chamber by day, and wandering like a ghost by night, refusing all admission. Moreover my good Aylward had appeared hitherto a paragon of a duenna for discretion, only over starched in her precision. Little did I expect to find my young lady spending all her evenings alone with him, and the solitary hermit transformed into a gay and gallant bachelor like the Friar of Orders Gray in the song. And since matters have gone to such a length, I, as a woman who has seen more of the world than you have, my dear good Betty, think it expedient that the Friar and his charmer should be made one without loss of time. *We* know her to be innocence itself, and him for a very Sidney for honour, but the world—”

“It is your doing, madam,” exclaimed Betty, passionately, completely upset by the insinuation ; “you bid us trust you, and then confess that you have exposed my sweet sister to be vilely slandered ! Oh my Aurelia, why did I let you out

of my sight!" she cried, while hot tears stood in her eyes.

"I know your warmth, my dear," said Lady Belamour with perfect command of temper; "I tell you I blame myself for not having recollected that a lovely maiden can tame even a savage brute, or that even in the sweet rural country walls have ears and trees have tongues. Not that any harm is done so far, nor ever will be; above all if your good father do not carry his romantic sentiments so far as to be his ruin a second time. Credit me, Betty, they will not serve in any world save the imaginary one that crazed Don Quixote. What but advantage can the pretty creature gain? She is only sixteen, quite untouched by true passion. She will obtain a name and fortune, and become an old man's idol for a few years, after which she will probably be at liberty by the time she is of an age to enjoy life."

"He is but five-and-forty!" said Betty.

"Well, if she arouse him to a second spring, there will be few women who will not envy her."

"You may colour it over, madam," said Betty,

drawing herself up, "but nothing can conceal the fact that you confess yourself to have exposed my innocent helpless sister to malignant slander; and that you assure me that the only course left is to marry the poor child to a wretched melancholic who has never so much as seen her face."

"You are outspoken, Miss Delavie," said Lady Belamour, softly, but with a dangerous glitter in her blue eyes. "I pardon your heat for your father's sake, and because I ascribe it to the exalted fantastic notions in which you have been bred; but remember that there are bounds to my forbearance, and that an agent in his state of health, and with his stubborn ideas, only remains on sufferance."

"My father has made up his mind to sacrifice anything rather than his child," cried Betty.

"My dear girl, I will hear you no more. You are doing him no service," said Lady Belamour kindly. "You had better be convinced that it is a sacrifice, or an unwilling one, before you treat me to any more heroics."

Betty successfully avoided a parting kiss, and

remained pacing up and down the room to work off her indignation before returning to her father. She was quite as angry with herself, as with my Lady, for having lost her temper, and so given her enemy an advantage, more especially as when her distress became less agitating, her natural shrewdness began to guess that the hint about scandal was the pure fruit of Lady Belamour's invention, as an expedient for obtaining her consent. Yet the mere breath of such a possibility of evil speaking was horror to her, and she even revolved the question of going herself to Bowstead to rescue her sister. But even if the journey had been more possible, her father was in no condition to be left to Harriet's care, and there was nothing to be done except to wait till he could again attend to the matter, calm herself as best she could, so as not to alarm him, and intercept all dangerous messages.

Several days had passed, and though the Major had not left his bed, he had asked whether more had been heard from my Lady, and discussed the subject with his daughter, when a letter

arrived in due course of post. It was written in a large bold hand, and the signature, across a crease in the paper, was in the irregular characters that the Major recognised as those of Mr. Belamour.

“DEAR AND HONOURED SIR,

“Proposals have been made to you on my Behalf for the Hand of your fair and amiable Daughter, Miss Aurelia Delavie. I am well aware how preposterous and even shocking they may well appear to you ; yet, let me assure you, on the Faith of a Man of Honour that if you will entrust her to me, wretched Recluse though I be, and will permit her to bear my Name, I will answer for her Happiness and Welfare. Situated as I am, I cannot enter into further explanations ; but we are old Acquaintance, though we have not met for many Years, and therefore I venture to beg of you to believe me when I say that if you will repose Confidence in me, and exercise Patience, I can promise your admirable Daughter such Preferment as she is far from expecting. She has been the Blessing of my darkened Life, but I would never

have presumed to ask further were it not that I have no other Means of protecting her, nor of shielding her from Evils that may threaten her, and that might prove far worse than bearing the Name of

“Your obedient Servant to command,

“AMYAS BELAMOUR.

“BOWSTEAD PARK, *Dec. 3rd*, 1737.”

“Enigmatical !” said Betty.

“It could hardly be otherwise if he had to employ a secretary,” said her father. “Who can have written for him?”

“His friend, Dr. Godfrey, most probably,” said Betty. “It is well spelt as well as indited, and has not the air of being drawn up by a lawyer.”

“No, it is not Hargrave’s hand. It is strange that he says nothing of settlements.”

“Here is a postscript, adding, ‘Should you consent, Hargrave will give you ample satisfaction as to the property which I can settle on your daughter.’”

“Of that I have no doubt,” said the Major. “Well, Betty, on reflection, if I were only secure

that no force was put on the child's will, and if I could exchange a few words face to face with Amyas Belamour, I should not be so utterly averse as I was at first sight. She is a good child, and if she like him, and find it not hard to do her duty by him, she might be as happy as another. And since she is out of our reach it might save her from worse. What say you, child?"

"That last is the strongest plea with me," said Betty, with set lips.

They took another evening for deliberation, but there was something in the tone of the letter that wrought on them, and it ended in a cautious consent being given, on the condition of the father being fully satisfied of his daughter's free and voluntary acquiescence.

"After all," he said to Betty, "I shall be able to go up to Bowstead for the wedding, and if I find that her inclinations have been forced, I can take her away at all risks."

CHAPTER XIX.

WOOING IN THE DARK.

You may put out my eyes with a ballad-maker's pen, and hang me up for the sign of blind Cupid.—*Much Ado About Nothing*.

AURELIA had been walking in the park with her two remaining charges, when a bespattered messenger was seen riding up to the door, and Letitia dropped her hoop in her curiosity and excitement.

Lady Belamour, on obtaining the Major's partial acquiescence, had felt herself no longer obliged to vegetate at Carminster, but had started for Bath, while the roads were still practicable; and had at the same time sent off a courier with letters to Bowstead. Kind Mrs. Dove had sent a little packet to each of the children, but they found Cousin Aura's sympathy grievously and

unwontedly lacking, and she at last replied to their repeated calls to her to share their delight, that they must run away, and display their treasures to Molly and Jumbo. She must read her letters alone.

The first she had opened was Betty's, telling her of her father's illness, which was attributed in great part to the distress and perplexity caused by Lady Belamour's proposal. Had it not been for this inopportune indisposition, both father and sister would have come to judge for themselves before entertaining it for a moment; but since the journey was impossible, he could only desire Betty to assure her sister that no constraint should be put on her, and that if she felt the least repugnance to the match, she need not consider herself obliged to submit. More followed about the religious duty of full consideration and prayer before deciding on what would fix her destiny for life, but all was so confusing to the girl, entirely unprepared as she was, that after hastily glancing on in search of an explanation which she failed to find, she

laid it aside, and opened the other letter. It began imperially

“MY COUSIN,

“No doubt you are already informed of the Honour that has been done you by the Proposal that Mr. Amyas Belamour has made to your Father for your Hand. It is no slight Compliment to a young Maid like you, from one of the most noted Wits about Town in the last Reign ; and you will no doubt shew the Good Sense to esteem yourself fortunate beyond all reasonable Expectations or Deserts of your own, as well as to act for the Advantage of your Family. Be assured that I shall permit no foolish Flightiness nor Reluctance to interfere with your true Welfare. I say this, because, as you well know, your Father’s Affection is strong and blind, and you might easily draw him into a Resistance which could but damage both his Health and his Prospects. On receiving the tidings of your Marriage, I promise to settle on him the Manor House with an Annuity of Three hundred Pounds ;

but if he should support you in any foolish Refusal, I shall be obliged to inform him that I can dispense with his Services ; therefore you will do wisely to abstain from any childish expressions of Distaste.

“On your Marriage, you will of course have the Enjoyment of the Pin Money with which Mr. Belamour will liberally endow you, and be treated in all Respects as a Married Lady. My Daughters shall be sent to School, unless you wish to make them your Companions a little longer. Expecting to hear from you that you are fully sensible to the good Fortune and the Obligations you are under to me,

“I remain,

“Yours &c.

“URANIA BELAMOUR.”

It was with a gasp of relief that Aurelia discovered what was required of her. “Marry Mr. Belamour ? Is that all ? Then why should they all think I should so much dislike it, my Lady, and my papa, and sister and all ? Nobody ever was so good to me, and maybe I could make

him a little happier, though it is not what I expected of him, to forget his Mary! Oh, no, I am not afraid; I might have been afraid six months ago, but now it is a different thing. I am not so foolish! And my dear papa will have the Manor House for ever! And Eugene will be able to go to a good school and have a pair of colours in good time! A fortunate girl! Yes, of course I am! Then Mrs. Phœbe and Mrs. Delia will not flout me any more, even if young Sir Amyas should come here! Ah! here are the little girls returning! Keep them here? Of course I will. What toys and books I will get for them!"

Yet, when the time for her summons drew nigh, a great dread and shyness overcame her, lest Mr. Belamour should begin on the subject; and she only nerved herself by recollecting that he could have had no one to read to him her father's letter of reply, and that he was scarcely likely to speak without knowing the contents. Still, it was only shyness and embarrassment that made her advance timidly, but in one moment a new sensation, a strange tremor came over her, as instead of merely her finger-tips, her whole hand was grasped and

fervently pressed, and in the silence that ensued the throbbing of her heart and the panting of her breath seemed to find an echo. However, the well-known voice began, "My fair visitor is very good in honouring me to-night."

Was it coming? Her heart gave such a throb that she could only murmur something inarticulate, while there was a hasty repressed movement near her.

"You have heard from your father?" said Mr. Belamour.

"My father is ill, sir," she faltered.

"Ah, yes, so I was sorry to understand. Has he not sent a message to you through your sister?"

"He has, sir," Aurelia continued, with difficulty, to utter.

There was another silence, another space of tightened breath and beating heart, absolutely audible, and again a hushed, restless movement heralded Mr. Belamour's next words, "Did I not tell you truly that my Lady devises most unexpected expedients?"

"Then would you not have it so, sir?" asked

Aurelia, in a bewildered voice of perplexity. "Oh!" as again one of those echoes startled her, "tell me what it all means."

"Hush! listen to me," said Mr. Belamour, in a voice that added to her undefined alarm by what seemed to her imperious displeasure as uncalled for as it was unusual; but the usual fatherly gentleness immediately prevailed, "My child, I should never have entertained the thought for a moment but for—but for Lady Belamour. This sounds like no compliment," he added, catching himself up, and manifesting a certain embarrassment and confusion very unlike his usual calm dignity of demeanour, and thus adding to the strange fright that was growing upon Aurelia. "But you must understand that I would not—even in semblance—have dreamt of your being apparently linked to age, sorrow, and infirmity, save that—strange as it may seem—Lady Belamour has herself put into my hands the best means of protecting you, and finally, as I trust, securing your happiness."

"You are very good, sir," she continued to breathe out, amid the flutterings of her heart,

and the reply produced a wonderful outburst of ardour in a low but fervent voice. "You will! You will! You sweetest of angels, you will be mine!"

There was something so irresistibly winning in the sound, that it drew forth an answer from the maiden's very heart. "Oh! yes, indeed—" and before she could utter another word she was snatched into a sudden, warm, vehement embrace, from which she was only partly released, as—near, but still not so near as she would have expected—this extraordinary suitor seemed to remonstrate with his ardent self, saying, "Now! now! that will do! So be it then, my child," he continued. "Great will be the need of faith, patience, trust, ay, and of self-restraint, but let these be practised for a little space, and all will be well."

She scarcely heard the latter words. The sense of something irrevocable and unfathomable was overpowering her. The mystery of these sudden alterations of voice, now near, now far off, was intolerable. Here were hands claiming her, fervent, eager breathings close upon her, and that serious, pensive voice going on all that time.

The darkness grew dreadful to her, dizziness came over her ; she dashed aside the hands, started up with a scream, and amid the strange noises and flashes of a swoon, knew no more till she heard Mrs. Aylward's voice over her, found the horrid smell of burnt feathers under her nose, and water trickling down her face, dim candlelight was round her, and she perceived that she was on a low settee in the lobby.

"There, she is coming round. You may tell your master, Jumbo, 'twas nothing but the mince pies."

"Oh, no—" began Aurelia, but her own voice seemed to come from somewhere else, and being inexperienced in fainting, she was frightened.

"That is right, you are better. Now, a drop of strong waters."

Aurelia choked, and put them aside, but was made to swallow the draught, and revived enough to ask, "How came I here?"

"Jumbo must have carried you out, ma'am, and laid you here before ever he called any one," said Mrs. Aylward. "Dear, dear, to think of your being taken like that. But the tins of those

mince-pies are over large ! You must halve one next time."

Aurelia was sensible enough to the reproof of greediness to begin to protest against the mince-pie theory, but she recollected that she could not account for her swoon, and thereupon became as red as she had been pale, thus confirming the housekeeper's opinion. A sound of footsteps made her start up and cry, "What's that?" in nervous fright ; but Mrs. Aylward declared it was fancy, and as she was by this time able to walk, she was conducted to her own room. There she was examined on her recent diet, and was compelled to allow the housekeeper to ascribe her illness to neglect of autumnal blood-letting and medicine ; and she only staved off the sending for the barber and his lancet the next morning by promising to swallow a dose compounded of all that was horrible.

She was altogether much shaken, she dreamed strange dreams by night, was capable of little by day, was declared by the children to be cross, and was much inclined to plead indisposition as an excuse for not visiting that alarming room in the

evening. Indeed for the greater part of the day she felt as if she must avail herself of the pretext, and as if she neither could nor would encounter that strange double creature in the dark ; but somehow she had been as much fascinated as terrified, and, in spite of her resolve, she found herself mechanically following Jumbo, shuddering all over and as cold as ice.

The dark chambers were warmed by German stoves, so that the atmosphere was always equable, and it seemed to revive her, while a kind, warm hand led her as usual to her seat, and it was the usual gentle, courteous, paternal tone that addressed her, "How chilly and trembling you are ! My poor child, you were sadly alarmed last night."

Aurelia murmured some excuse about being very foolish.

"It was not you who was foolish," was the reply ; and though her hand was retained it was evidently for the sake of warming it, and comforting her, not of caressing it in the startling mode of yesterday. There was a pause, during which her composure began to be restored, and some inquiries whether

she were quite recovered ; to which she replied with eager affirmatives, feeling indeed quite herself again, now that all was in its familiar state around her. Then this strange suitor spoke again. "It is a hard and cruel fate that my Lady has sought to impose on you."

"Oh, do not say so, sir, I——"

"No," he interrupted somewhat hastily, "do not try to deny it, my child ; I know better than you can what it would amount to. Believe me, I only lend myself to her arrangement because I know no better means of guarding you and preserving you for better days."

"I know how kind you are, sir."

"And you trust me ?"

"Indeed I do."

"That is all I ask. I shall never be a husband to you more than in name, Aurelia, nor ask of you more than you give me now, namely, your sweet presence for a few hours in the evening, without seeing me. Can you bear thus to devote your young life, for a time at least ?"

"You know, sir, how glad I always am to be with you," said Aurelia, relieved yet half regretting

that strange fervour. "I will do my very best to please you."

"Ah! sweet child," he began, with a thrill of deep feeling in his voice; but checking himself he continued, "All I ask is patience and trust for a time—for a time—you promise it!"

"With all my heart," said Aurelia.

"I will use my best endeavours to requite that trust, my child," he said. "Is not the Christian watchword faith, not sight? It must be yours likewise."

"I hope so," she said, scarcely understanding.

He then interrogated her somewhat closely as to the letters which had prepared her for the proposal; and as Aurelia was far too simple to conceal anything under cross-examination, Mr. Belamour soon found out what her Ladyship's threats and promises had been.

"The Manor House?" he said. "That is the original nucleus of the property which had hitherto gone to the heir male?"

"So my sister told me," said Aurelia.

"That letter, which Dr. Godfrey read to me, spoke of my poor brother's discomfort in holding

it. It is well if thus tardily she refund it, though not as your price, my poor child. It should have been as matter of justice, if not by her husband's dying wish. So this is the alternative set before you! Has it been set before your father likewise?"

"Almost certainly she will have threatened to dismiss him if he do not consent. It was that which made my sister decide on sending me here, or what would become of him and Eugene? But I should think my Lady knew my father better than to seem to offer any kind of price, as you call it, for me."

"Precisely. You have heard from this maternal sister of yours? Does he then give his consent?"

"They say they will not have my inclinations forced, and that they had rather undergo anything than that I should be driven to—to—"

"To be as much a sacrifice as Iphigenia," he concluded the sentence.

"Indeed, sir," said Aurelia, quite restored, "I cannot see why they should imagine me to have such objections, or want me to be so cautious and considerate. I shall write to my papa that

it is not at all repugnant to me, for that you are very, very good to me; and if I can make your time pass ever so little more pleasantly, it is a delight to me. I am sure I shall like you better than if——”

“Stay, stay, child,” he said, half laughing; “remember, it is as a father that I ask you to love and trust the old recluse.”

She thought she had been forward, crimsoned in the dark, and retired into her shell for the rest of the evening. She was glad when with his usual tact, Mr. Belamour begged for the recitation he knew she could make with the least effort of memory.

At the end, however, she ventured to ask—“Sir, shall I be permitted ever to see my father and sister?”

“Certainly, my child. In due time I hope you will enjoy full liberty, though you may have to wait for it.”

Aurelia durst not ask what was in her mind, whether they would not come to the wedding, but that one great hope began to outweigh all the strange future. She began to say something about

being too young, ignorant, and foolish for him, but this was kindly set aside, she hardly knew how. Mr. Belamour himself suggested the formula in which she might send her consent to Lady Belamour, begging at the same time to retain the company of the little Misses Wayland. To her father she wrote such a letter as might satisfy all doubts as to the absence of all repugnance to the match, and though the Major had sacrificed all to love and honour himself, *mariages de convenance* were still so much the rule, and wives, bestowed in all passiveness with unawakened hearts, so often proved loving and happy matrons, that it would have been held unreasonable to demand more than absence of dislike on the part of the bride.

Therewith things returned to their usual course, and she was beginning to feel as if all had been a dream, when one evening, about a week later, her suitor appeared to have one of those embarrassing fits of youthful ardour; her hand was passionately seized, caressed, toyed with by a warm strong hand, and kissed by lips that left a burning impression and that were no longer hairy. Surely he had been shaving! Was the time for which he

bade her wait, his full recovery, and the resumption of the youthfulness that seemed to come on him in fits and starts, and then to ebb away, and leave him the grave courteous old man she had first known? And why was it always in a whisper that he spoke forth all those endearments which thrilled her with such strange emotions?

When she came into the light, she found her fourth finger encircled with an exquisite emerald ring, which seemed to bind her to her fate, and make her situation tangible. Another time she was entreated to give a lock of her hair, and she of course did so, though it was strange that it should confer any pleasure on her suitor in the dark.

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